Charles Solomon
foreword by Lee Mendelson

The Art and Making of Peanuts Animation
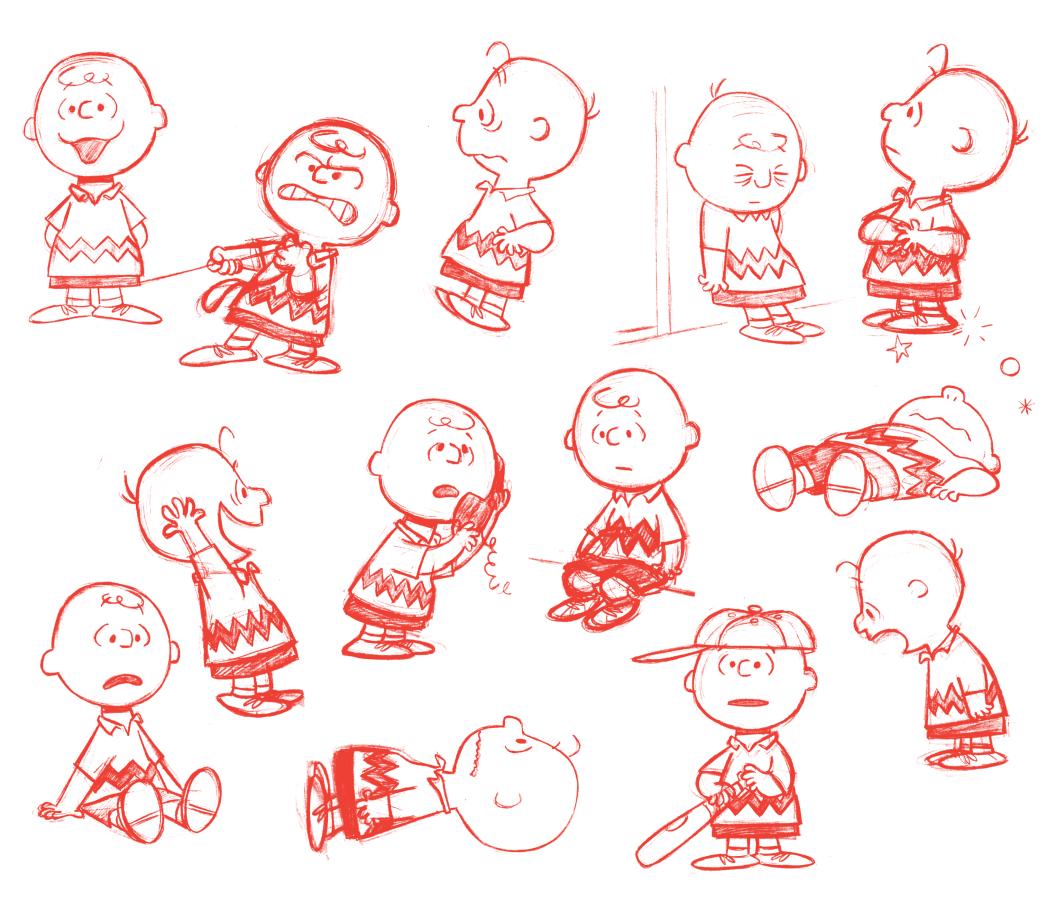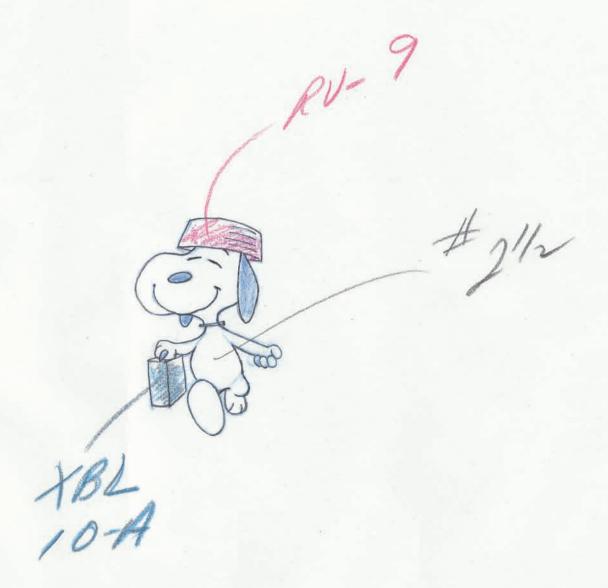
Celebrating Fifty Years of Television Specials

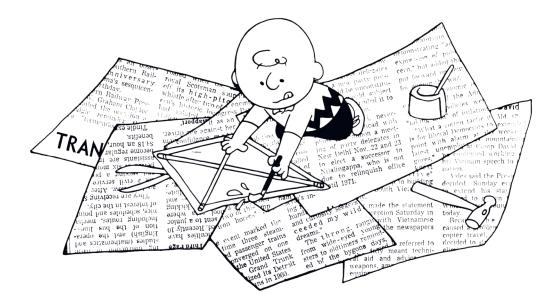**The Art and Making of Peanuts Animation**

The Art and Making of Peanuts Animation

Charles Solomon

Foreword by Lee Mendelson

To the memories of Bill Littlejohn, Bill Melendez, and Charles Schulz—three artists whose work I continue to enjoy and whose company I miss.

CHARLES SOLOMON

Half-title page:
Snoopy Come Home, 1972
Artist unknown
Red and blue pencil

Title page:
Publicity still, 1965

This page:
A Boy Named Charlie Brown Movie, 1969
Artist unknown
Ink, newsprint

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It Was a Short Summer, Charlie Brown, 1969
Production cel

Foreword

When I started producing a documentary about Charles "Sparky" Schulz in the fall of 1963, I asked him if we could possibly include a few minutes of animation. He had already been approached by Hollywood producers about making animation out of his *Peanuts*, but had been leery of taking the plunge into television. He said: "You know the great thing about being a cartoonist is that you have 100 percent control of the comic strip—you are the writer, producer, director, and stage manager all at once. So it's scary to turn your characters over to other people in a completely different medium." We talked about it some more and then he said: "Well, if we're going to do this, there is only one person I would trust. His name is Bill Melendez. We worked together a few years ago on a few minutes of animation. You should meet him."

And that was the start of our three-way partnership that would extend for thirty-eight years and produce fifty network specials and four feature films. Sparky's leap of faith was rewarded by one of the greatest animation teams in entertainment history—the producers and directors and inkers and painters and editors of Bill Melendez Productions.

I am thrilled with Charles Solomon's brilliantly researched, first-ever in-depth look behind the scenes of *Peanuts* animation. As will any reader, I am learning for the first time all sorts of details about the individual contributions of the Melendez team. I also appreciate the heart-warming comments from so many famous animators (of my favorite movies) throughout the industry. I never realized the impact our shows have had on creators whom I admire so much.

It never ceases to amaze me how Sparky's characters have permeated all facets of American society. On a daily basis, references to Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Linus, Lucy, and the rest of the characters appear in everything from books of fiction, feature films, TV sitcoms, sports commentary, late-night television, and even the way we speak.
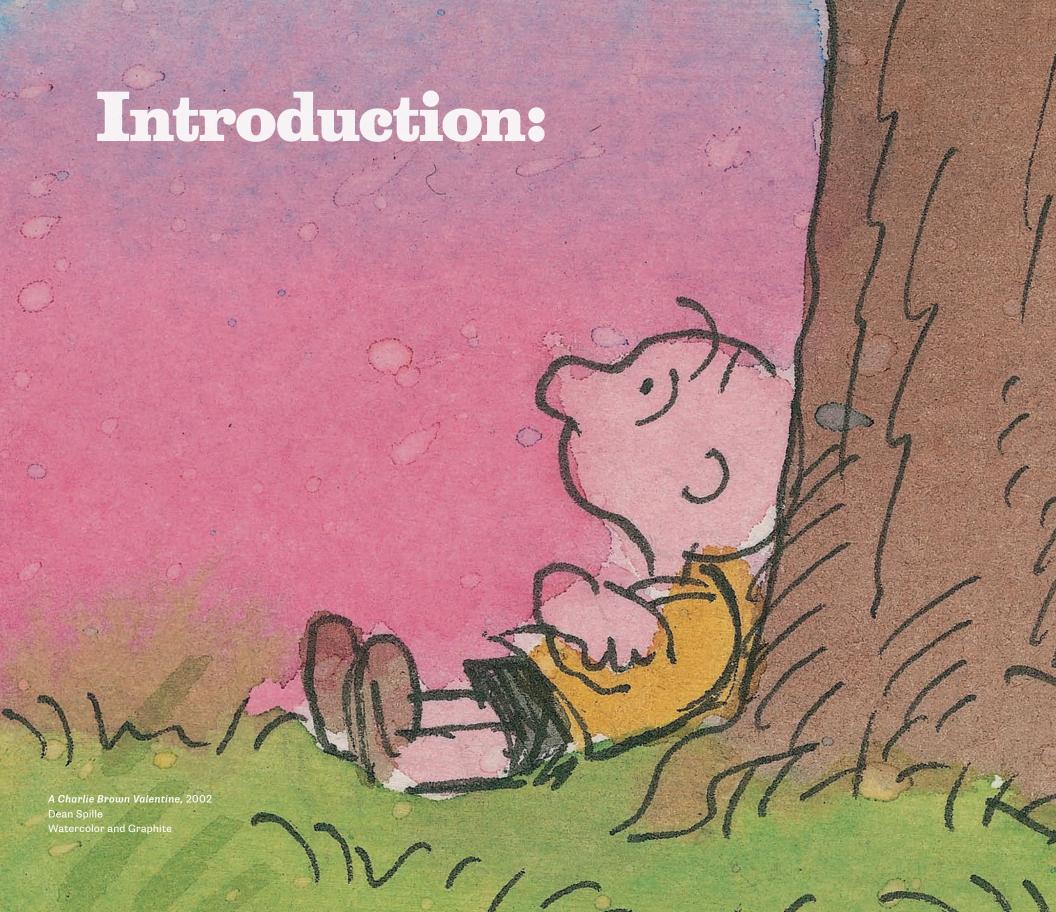
One example of those last two items: On the fortieth anniversary of *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, CNN did an extensive interview with me. But that night on his show, Jimmy Kimmel edited the interview so that, after each CNN question, instead of seeing and hearing me, we see an elderly lady answering each question by saying, "Wah-wah-wah." The audience started laughing after the first "wah-wah" because three generations have grown up knowing how the teacher's voice is humorously masked in the TV specials.
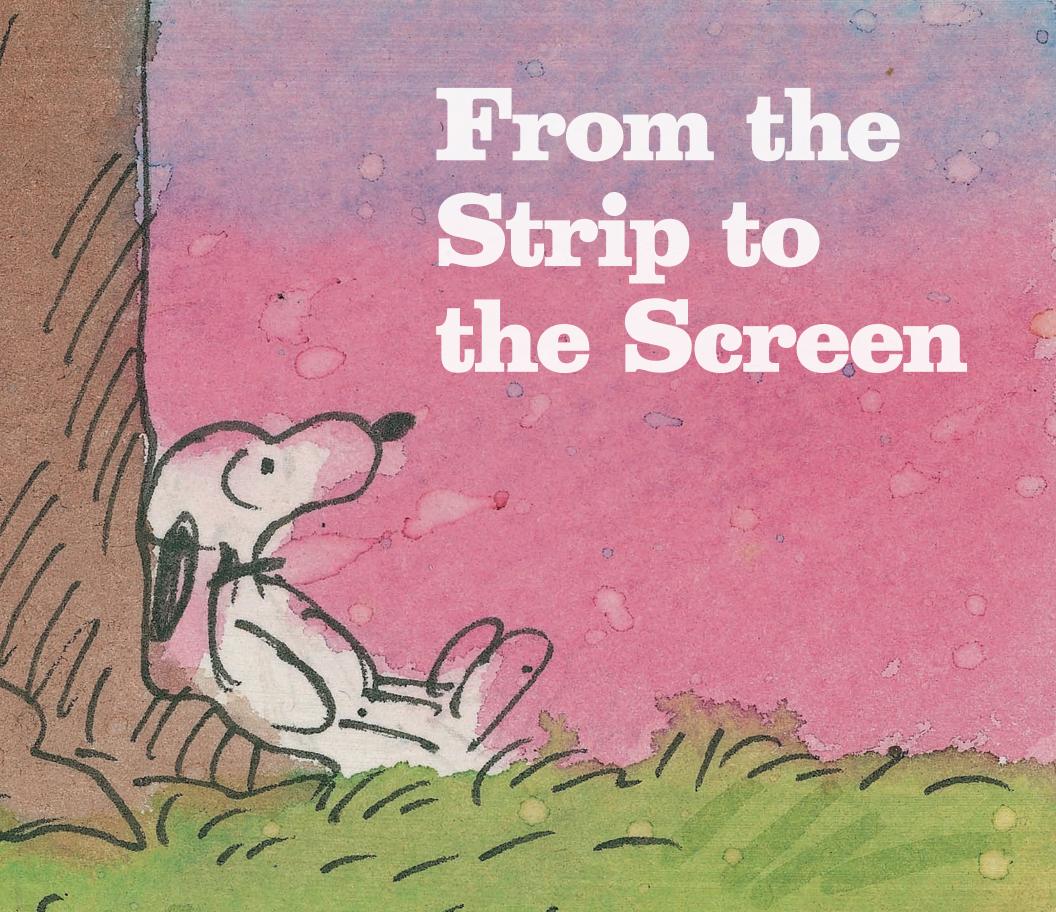
And of course, the *Peanuts* characters—and the music of Vince Guaraldi—have now become part of the American holiday fabric. The dance scene in *A Charlie Brown Christmas* underscores the brilliant way that the Melendez team could take *Peanuts* off the comic page and bring it to life on the television screen. And Bill Littlejohn's animation of Snoopy flying his doghouse and Snoopy and Lucy arm wrestling have to be among the classics of animation.

It was an honor for me to work with Bill and his other directors—Sam Jaimes, Phil Roman, and Larry Leichliter—and it's very gratifying that they are finally getting the credit they deserve, though they did reject the one idea I had for animation in thirty-eight years. There was a scene in *It's Magic, Charlie Brown* where Snoopy makes Charlie Brown disappear. There is nothing on the television screen, just offstage voices. I suggested that if we did a whole bunch of scenes like that, not only would it be funny but also it would save a lot of animation costs. Bill said: "Do you want me to tell Sparky about your suggestion?" So that ended that right there.

Thanks to Charles Solomon, a life-long devotee of animation, and to Chronicle Books for making this tribute happen. I am certain that Bill Melendez, Bill Littlejohn, and Sparky Schulz are smiling from above.

Lee Mendelson
April 2012

Introduction:

A Charlie Brown Valentine, 2002
Dean Spille
Watercolor and Graphite

From the Strip to the Screen

The Peanuts *television specials were up there with* The Wizard of Oz *and* Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*: The whole world would stop, and you knew that everywhere every kid was in his living room watching the same thing. You would repeat the lines and discuss them the next day in school.*

Andrew Stanton, director, *Wall-E*

On December 9, 1965, a round-headed little boy walked across the screens of more than fifteen million televisions in America, complaining, "Christmas is coming, but I'm not happy. I don't feel the way I'm supposed to feel. I just don't understand Christmas, I guess."

Charlie Brown had initially been animated in a series of Ford Falcon commercials, which debuted in January 1960, and in the titles for *The Tennessee Ernie Ford Show* shortly thereafter. But *A Charlie Brown Christmas* (1965) was, in the words of *Time* magazine's critic "a special that really is special." For the millions of baby boomers who watched that initial broadcast, it became an instant classic.
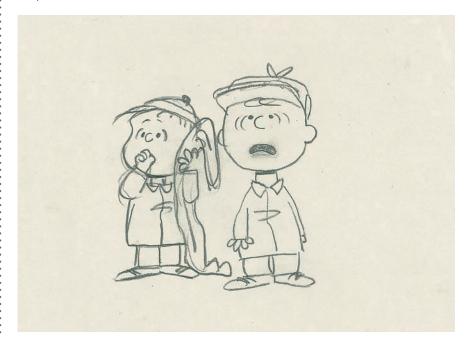
Animator Eric Goldberg recalls, "The only one on our block with a color TV was Mrs. Middleton down the street. She invited all the neighborhood kids over to see *A Charlie Brown Christmas*: I remember seeing it when it premiered. A lot of people don't understand that in the mid-'60s into the '70s, everybody was *Peanuts* mad. So the animation specials couldn't have come at a better time."

As Goldberg notes, *Peanuts* was rising toward a pinnacle of popularity no other comic strip has matched, appearing in more than 2,600 papers worldwide and selling billions of dollars' worth of character merchandise. During the next forty-five years, dozens of specials and four theatrical features would earn Emmys, Peabody Awards, and an Oscar nomination. The phenomenal popularity of the comic strip contributed to the enormous success of the specials, and vice versa.

Yet *A Charlie Brown Christmas* had been made quickly and on a miniscule budget. The executives at CBS disliked the show and only aired it because it had already been scheduled. The artists feared they had created a flop, ending Charlie Brown's television career just as it was beginning.

The story of *A Charlie Brown Christmas* began two years earlier, when filmmaker Lee Mendelson produced the baseball documentary *A Man Named Mays*, which aired on NBC. He wanted to follow it with a documentary on Charles Schulz that would include a minute or two of animation. At Schulz's suggestion, Mendelson approached Bill Melendez, who had directed the Ford commercials. The Ford campaign, which ran for several years, featured more polished animation than had the titles for *The Tennessee Ernie Ford Show*. When Snoopy danced across the screen, his movements were close to Schulz's original drawings, although his large back paws prevented the artists from creating the looser, free-spirited élan of a similar dance performed a few years later in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

A Charlie Brown Christmas, 1965
Artist unknown
Graphite

No one was interested in the documentary, which sat on the shelf for five years before airing. But when *Time* ran a cover story about *Peanuts*, John Allen of the McCann-Erickson Agency asked Mendelson, Schulz, and Melendez to create an animated special that Coca-Cola would sponsor (executives at Coca-Cola had seen the Schulz special). They had less a than week to prepare an outline, which was approved. The show went into production on a six-month schedule.

Years later, Melendez recalled, "At that time, specials were always one hour. They wanted me to do a one-hour show in about four months. I said, 'You can't do it. Besides, you don't want to make a one-hour show. It's too much animation all at once. Do a half hour, and that's it.'

"I didn't know what to charge, because nobody had done any specials," he continued "I called my 'good friend' Bill Hanna and said, 'What should I budget for this thing?' He said, 'That's private information of the corporation. I can't tell you.' I think they gave me seventy-six thouand dollars to do a half-hour show. It cost me ninety-six thousand dollars. As soon as the show aired, the first phone call I got was from Hanna: 'Heeeey! You lost your shirt, didn't you?'"

In 2001, Mendelson estimated that the three partners had earned more than five million dollars from *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

Melendez, who had worked at Disney, Warner Bros., and UPA before moving into commercials, saw all of the shortcuts the breakneck schedule and minimal budget had required. He wasn't pleased.

Mendelson adds, "I'll never forget the day—it was about three weeks before the show was to air, and we had never seen it in its entirety. So Bill and I and maybe ten of his staff watched it. In the closing credits, they had misspelled 'Schulz': They had a 't' in it. They had to redo that right away. Bill turned to me and said, 'I think we've ruined Charlie Brown.' But Ed Levitt, one of the main animators, stood up and said, 'This show is going to run for a hundred years.' Everybody thought he was nuts."
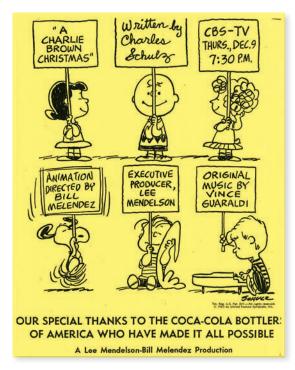

A Charlie Brown Christmas, 1965
Production cel

The CBS executives were even less enthusiastic. They found the show "flat" and "slow" and announced they wouldn't order any further specials. But *A Charlie Brown Christmas* was the number-two rated show of the week, beating *Gomer Pyle*, *The Man from U.N.C.L.E.*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies*. Mendelson continues, "One of the CBS guys who had hated it called me and said, 'We're going to order four more, but my aunt in New Jersey didn't like it either.'"

The show became a Christmas staple. Jef Mallett, the creator of the comic strip *Frazz*, says, "The *Peanuts* specials were your indication that the holidays had arrived. When *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* [1966] and *A Charlie Brown Christmas* came on, you knew the holiday season had arrived, and it was a very happy time indeed."

Pete Docter, the Oscar-winning director of *Monsters, Inc.* and *Up*, agrees. "The two I always tried to see were the Christmas special and *It's the Great Pumpkin*. They would be on at set times, and I demanded my parents rearrange our social calendar so we could be home then. Because they were just on once, then you had to wait until next year."

In addition to its popularity and critical success—the program won both an Emmy and a Peabody Award—*A Charlie Brown Christmas* set the pattern for decades of *Peanuts* specials: a combination of thoughtful stories, limited but effective animation, a cast of children's voices, and a stylish jazz score. It also established the half-hour animated special as a staple of network television. Chuck Jones's adaptation of Dr. Seuss's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas* followed in 1966, and Rankin-Bass's *Frosty the Snowman* in 1969.

A Charlie Brown Christmas, 1965
A promotional ad that ran in the *Hollywood Reporter* and *Daily Variety*.
Charles M. Schulz
Graphite and Ink

Schulz's Vision in a New Medium

We did A Charlie Brown Christmas, *and we didn't do it as a children's show at all. But because it was animated, it was immediately nominated as the best children's show. We won the Emmy, and ever since, we've been labeled as children's shows. I keep telling people, I don't write for children. I wouldn't know how to write for children. Writing for children is the hardest thing in the world: I wouldn't even attempt it.*
    Charles Schulz

Schulz (whom everyone called "Sparky"), Mendelson, and Melendez quickly established a working relationship and a friendship that would last until Schulz's death in 2000. Mendelson explains, "Usually Bill would come up to San Francisco, I'd drive him up to Santa Rosa, and the three of us would work together. Sparky would come up with about fifteen to seventeen minutes of script or elements, leaving room for Bill to add animated elements like Snoopy fighting the chair in *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* [1973]. We would add little things from time to time, but it was mostly his script."

Phil Roman, who directed fourteen of the specials, adds, "Bill would fly up to Santa Rosa, meet with Sparky, and talk about the next show. Sparky trusted Bill a lot. He was one of the very few people he listened to as far as contributing to a show: To everybody else he would say, 'Yeah, that's a good idea,' and ignore it. Bill would take a lot of notes, come back to the studio, and do a storyboard. Then he'd go over it with Sparky, who'd make comments."

Pixar story artist Jeff Pidgeon comments, "A strength of the strip has always been that it presented very sophisticated ideas and points of view in a very simple way, and the specials reflect that beautifully. Mendelson and Melendez were really great not to let their egos get in the way. They let the strip maintain its character, its integrity, and its approach in animation."

Peanuts was the exclusive creation of Charles Schulz: Unlike many strip cartoonists, he never used assistants,

ghost writers, or letterers. He drew every line and wrote every word. On *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Mendelson and Melendez learned that Schulz could be a generous collaborator, but that once he made a decision, there was no point in trying to dissuade him.

"Up until then, many, if not all, animated shows had laugh tracks," Mendelson recalls. "As we were discussing how we would handle our special, I said very casually, 'I assume we'll have a laugh track.' It was a statement, not a question. Sparky just got up and quietly walked out of the room. We looked at each other, then Bill said, 'Well, I guess we won't have a laugh track.' Sparky came back in the room, and we went on with the meeting as if the subject had never come up."

Melendez was initially dismayed about having Linus recite the Gospel of St. Luke: "I said, 'Sparky, this is religion. It just doesn't go in a cartoon.' He looked at me very coldly and said, 'Bill, if we don't do it, who will? We can do it.' He was right. That's been the most commented-on little sequence of that show—Linus telling the true meaning of Christmas. But every time I see that scene, I wince. It's such poor animation, such bad drawings."

Melendez may have winced, but the scene became a touchstone for animation artists. Andrew Stanton, the Oscar-winning director of *Finding Nemo* and *Wall-E*, comments, "You watch Linus reciting St. Luke, and you realize that, even now, it was a ballsy move. They stopped everything: just a single spotlight on a kid standing onstage, saying this long passage. It was very moving because of the stillness, because of everything stopping for the simplicity of it."

Animator Doug Sweetland adds, "Linus's performance is something where less is more. That's a cliché, but you have to make sure that you're being true to the character, and not simply moving something for the sake of moving it. You want to get out of the way of the performance, even as the performer: Something simply stated is often much more powerful than something elaborately stated."

Since its debut in 1950 in seven newspapers, *Peanuts* had matured into one of the most popular and influential strips in the history of the comics. Throughout the years, Schulz had developed numerous themes—Linus's security blanket, Charlie Brown's doomed attempts to kick the football, the Great Pumpkin, the WWI Flying Ace, et al.—that could be developed into stories for TV specials. He had also created a cast of well-known, well-loved, and flexible characters who could be placed in new situations.

"The characters are like a repertory company—I always think of Jack Benny's repertory company," Mendelson says. "Everybody knew their idiosyncrasies because we had the brilliance of Charles Schulz's writing, half original material for the shows and half from the comic strip."

Schulz's close friend, *For Better or For Worse* cartoonist Lynn Johnston, adds thoughtfully, "Sparky was as much a victim as Charlie Brown: the loser, the wimp, the guy that never accomplished anything. He was demanding and forceful and impatient, like Lucy. He was as introspective and thoughtful and compassionate as Linus. He was as athletic as Peppermint Patty, and as magical as Snoopy. He was all of those characters. I think by being all those characters he often was an enigma to all of us."

The stories for some of the specials were closely adapted from the comic strip. *You're Not Elected, Charlie Brown* (1972) followed a series Schulz had drawn in October 1964 about Linus running for school president. The only major difference was that in the special, Charlie Brown served as assistant campaign manager to Lucy, rather than running for vice president. The story about Linus and Lucy moving away in *Is This Goodbye, Charlie Brown?* (1983) had run in print in May 1966. Many specials took scenes and dialogue from the strips and used them in new stories, while *What a Nightmare, Charlie Brown* (1978) and *It's Magic, Charlie Brown* (1981) depicted adventures that had never appeared in print.
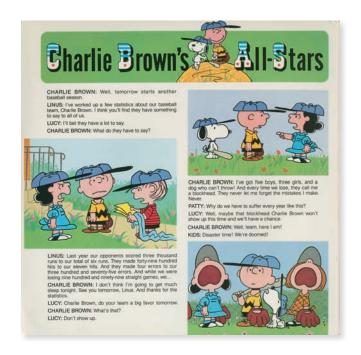
Schulz was a man who relished a challenge. His widow, Jeannie, says he was never interested in what he had drawn the day before. The animated specials offered him new

challenges and opportunities. Schulz commented, "I think the secret in any of these things is to know your medium and to stay within it. There are things you can do in a comic strip which you can't do in any other medium. In animation we can do things that the comic strip can't do."

"We lasted thirty-eight years because he kept coming up with things, whether it was the fantasy with Snoopy at the North Pole in *What a Nightmare* or the show about cancer," states Mendelson. "He wouldn't hesitate to risk his characters doing something patriotic like in *What Have We Learned, Charlie Brown?* [1983] or the cancer-themed *Why, Charlie Brown, Why?* [1990]. Frankly that's what kept him interested in doing television: He could do different things."

Another reason Mendelson cites for the continued success of the specials was the freedom the creators enjoyed: "The network left us alone. We worked in three different cities and only saw each other once or twice a month. Each respected the others; it was three good friends getting together, working and having a good time. If we felt like doing a show, we did it. If we didn't, we didn't. If we wanted to do two or three a year, we did two or three."

Before the network executives had declared they would not order any more specials, Mendelson, Schulz, and Melendez had begun work on a second. "We had started a baseball show; we didn't know if it would ever sell or not," Mendelson recalls. "About one-fifth of Sparky's strips were about baseball, and I'd been a lifelong baseball fan, as was he. When they asked if we had another one, we said we had *Charlie Brown's All-Stars* [1966]. I felt that if anything was ever going to work with Charlie Brown, it would be baseball."

As the long-suffering manager of the worst team in the history of baseball, Charlie Brown faces a moral dilemma in *All-Stars*: The owner of a local store will provide uniforms— *if* he'll get rid of Snoopy and the girls on his team. (Schulz was an ardent supporter of women's sports and later hosted a women's tennis tournament.) As desperately as Charlie Brown wants the uniforms, he remains loyal to his friends.

Charlie Brown's All-Stars, 1966
Record album cover art

To express the team's gratitude, Lucy sews Linus's blanket into a manager's uniform.

Charlie Brown's All-Stars aired on June 8, 1966, and earned equally stellar ratings. "*All-Stars* deals with girls in sports," Pidgeon comments. "It also deals with a common theme of Schulz's: people blowing up at each other without thinking, then someone has to come along and level them off. It's that Lucy/Linus contrast of having the very emotional person who just goes BLAM and explodes, then Linus comes up and makes her realize she overreacted."

"*Great Pumpkin*, *Christmas*, and *All-Stars* are the three specials I hold in highest regard," says Dave Pruiksma, who animated Mrs. Potts and Chip in *Beauty and the Beast*. "They used to show *All-Stars* every spring, then they stopped. I saw it again recently, and it's a great little show."

All-Stars was eclipsed by the third *Peanuts* special, which aired October 27, 1966. *A Charlie Brown Christmas* is the most beloved of the specials, but the general consensus is that *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* is the best.
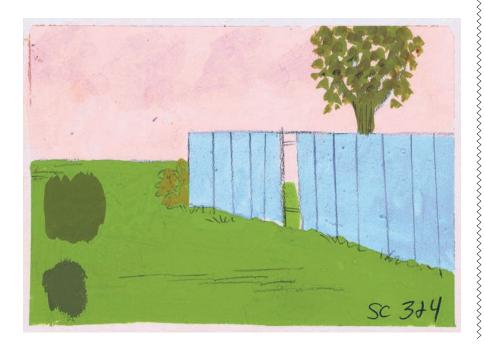
Above and below:
It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, 1966
Dean Spille
Gouache

Once again, the program was produced under stress and on a minimal budget.

"The pressure came from the network," Mendelson recalls. "They said, 'Look, the first two were really good. Now we need a holiday blockbuster.' When I mentioned the 'holiday blockbuster' to Bill and Sparky, Sparky said without hesitation, 'Hey, the Great Pumpkin! We've got one.' We talked about the World War I Flying Ace outfit making Snoopy look like he was in a Halloween costume, and Sparky said, 'Wouldn't it be great if we could animate Snoopy flying?' Bill stood up, faking umbrage, and said 'Well, of course we could make him fly! That's what I do! I'm an animator!'"

It's the Great Pumpkin brought two of Schulz's best-known themes to the screen: Charlie Brown's attempt to kick the football, only to have Lucy snatch it away, and Snoopy's fantasy of being a dashing World War I pilot. In the strips, Schulz gave Snoopy an internal monologue; for the TV show, a narration spoken by Charlie Brown set up the situation. But Snoopy's aerial battle with the Red Baron and his subsequent crash landing in enemy territory was done entirely in mime in a striking fantasy sequence.

"When Snoopy is behind enemy lines, trying to get back to safety, it's treated as if it's reality," says Pidgeon. "It's not like he's just running around a suburb. There are bombed-out houses in the French countryside, barbed wire, and you hear sirens. It's really eerie. I was struck by that stuff as a kid. It took me to some other place, and I liked that. The mood felt rich and evocative: It was more than just Walter Mitty."

Paul Felix, who served as art director on Disney's *Bolt* and *Winnie the Pooh*, adds, "I love the look of the landscape when he crashes in his imaginary No-Man's-Land. It's set off from the rest of the show: I remember feeling I must have been transported someplace—or it was taking place inside his head. It was a nice contrast to the design of the rest of the show."

Dean Spille, who painted the backgrounds for the sequence, responds modestly, "I had been to Europe, so I was

familiar with the landscape Snoopy explored in the World War I segment. Bill and Sparky were great about allowing me to do anything in terms of colorful skies and clouds and so forth. And it seemed to work."

Mendelson is more enthusiastic in his evaluation of the show: "*The Great Pumpkin* set the standard. The color was unbelievable. The animation got better right away. Snoopy had changed from the Christmas show: He had a real long nose, then Schulz changed it in the strip and Bill changed it in the animation. We had the Red Baron flying scene, which is probably the most famous animated scene we did, other than Linus reading from the Bible. It's as perfect a show as I think you could get in a half hour."

Even Melendez, who was always critical of his own work, conceded, "The *Pumpkin* show, I liked. I did it under great duress. I still had that seventy-six-thousand-dollar budget, but I knew how to pace myself to make it cheaper. The story was good, and the music was great. It was a beautifully designed and beautifully colored show."

It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, 1966
Snoopy as WWI Flying Ace
Production cels

Bill Melendez and Animation

One thing that helped us in a negative fashion was the terrible budgets. We were forced to do the best we could within those dumb budgets. Had we started from the very beginning using computers and trying to animate these characters as close to real-life animation as possible, it would have been a disaster.
Bill Melendez

As the director of the initial specials, José Cuauhtémoc "Bill" Meléndez was the individual most responsible for translating Schulz's vision onto the screen. Lynn Johnston states, "I don't think Bill was ever given the credit he deserved for taking what Sparky gave them and making so much more of it. Bill didn't crow a lot about his work and his talent. But Sparky trusted him implicitly. Bill was the only one who could draw his characters and put words in their mouths."

In a 1984 interview with Leonard Maltin, Schulz said, "I think I have been able to make the transition from comic strips to animation because working with Bill I can see things in my mind and see how they're going to work on the screen. I don't think all comic strip artists have been able to do that. It was fortunate that Bill and I got together. We appreciate what each other does."

Born in Sonora, Mexico, in 1916, Melendez moved with his family to Arizona in 1928, then to Los Angeles, where he attended the Chouinard Art Institute. He began his career at the Walt Disney Studio in 1939, contributing to the features *Pinocchio*, *Fantasia*, *Bambi*, and *Dumbo*, as well as Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck shorts. At Disney, he acquired the nickname "Bill" when his coworkers had trouble pronouncing "Cuauhtémoc."

In 1948, Melendez joined the UPA Studio, whose innovative approach to animation delighted him. "The animation we were doing was not limited, but stylized," he explained. "When you analyze Chaplin's shorts, you realize people don't move that way—he stylized his movements. We were going to do the same thing for animation. We were going to animate the work

of Sam Cobean, Saul Steinberg—all the great cartoonists of the moment—and move them as the designs dictated." Years later, he applied that philosophy to the *Peanuts* characters.

"The success came because Bill decided early on just to move the characters off the comic page," says Mendelson. "Because of that, he didn't need an elaborate budget. But he didn't do it to save money, he did it because he felt that was the best way to do it."

As *Peanuts* developed, Schulz stripped the superfluous elements from his drawings to create an eloquent minimalism. A single line was all he needed to define the shape of Charlie Brown's head or a pose that suggested movement, body language, and attitude. Drawing on the ideas he had explored at UPA, Melendez devised ways to move the characters that preserved the look and feel of the comic strip.

"Bill was a funny man who loved to laugh. He understood comedy. He understood strong posing," says commercial animator Bob Kurtz. "The strip is very strongly posed, but what do you do with motion, with those very strong poses that almost don't want to be moved? He turned the strip into a stage that's very flat. There's rarely a scene with anything going in perspective. People enter from the right, go back out, or leave from the other direction—you'd think you had doors at the ends of your TV screen."

"Because I grew up with the comic strip, it always impressed me how Melendez brought the comic strip to the screen," adds *Phineas and Ferb* cocreator Jeff Marsh. "It always felt like it was just a living version of that comic strip. He made sure everything he did had that feel, like the comic strip was just snapshots of the life we saw in those animated specials. The creator of something can't ask for better than to get a director who really embraces what you're trying to do. Melendez clearly did."

"As a director, Melendez had his own rhythm; it was a measured pace with some unexpected elements. It was very like jazz, with a free-form sense to it," agrees David Silverman, the director of *The Simpsons Movie*. "He also had a nice sense of comic timing, teeing up the jokes properly

and delivering the punch lines without distracting the eye. It seems obvious, but I'm always surprised at how many people don't get that. Schulz revolutionized the timing in comic strips with his use of frames with no dialogue: He did it cinematically, just holding and waiting on the anticipation. Bill followed through on that very well in the animation."

True to the UPA philosophy, the animation was not so much limited as stylized to preserve the visual rhythms of the strip and the shapes of the characters. "The choices Melendez made for those limitations, whether he set them on himself or not, really set him apart," adds Stanton. "There's plenty of other examples of limited animation entertainment that seem limited. What I always find surprising about his work was you never felt like you were being denied something. It was the best, most positive definition of 'limited animation' there could ever be."

Charles Schulz accepts the Emmy for Best Network Animated Special in 1966 for *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, flanked by Executive Producer Lee Mendelson, left, and Director/Animator Bill Melendez, right.

A "Charlie Brown" Voice

I was fed half a sentence by half a sentence by Bill Melendez. He gave me the inflections that he wanted, and when you're nine years old, you can mimic pretty much anything. So he's responsible for the tone of Charlie Brown. They'd show me a storyboard and say, 'You're going to run to kick this football, Lucy's going to pull it away from you, and you're going to go, AAAAAAAUGH!!'
Peter Robbins, the original voice of Charlie Brown

Melendez was a tall man with a thick, black crew cut and a sweeping handlebar moustache. Lee Mendelson's son Jason recalls, "When Bill came into the room, he was the greatest of cartoon characters—in a good way. He had the mustache, he had the crew cut, he had this amazing, powerful voice with the accent, he spoke with such emphasis. And he was always so jovial."

That imposing but appealing presence helped when he coached the children who provided the voices at the recording sessions of the early specials. For most of the history of American animation, children's voices had been supplied by adult actors. During the '50s, John and Faith Hubley had started to explore the spontaneity of real children's voices in their commercials for Maypo and their personal films, beginning with the Oscar-winning *Moonbird* (1959).

Melendez had used children's voices for the early commercials and titles, and Schulz insisted on continuing with them. Casting a voice for a character the audience already knows from a comic strip poses a challenge: Everyone who reads the strip has already "heard" the character in their head. The voice actor has to sound so right for the character's appearance and personality that the performance erases the preconceived ideas.

Schulz later said of the casting process, "We discovered that there were a lot of Linus's voices around. Charlie Brown is the hardest voice to get. We want a voice that is bland and dull and without character, and we've always had the most trouble finding voices for him."

Director/Animator Bill Melendez works with four young cast members in the recording studio. From left to right are Gai DeFaria, Lynda Mendelson, Anne Altieri, and Sally Dryer. In this session the cast is recording *It Was a Short Summer, Charlie Brown*, 1969.

"The kids Bill used in the commercials were the same ones that ended up on the *Charlie Brown Christmas*, even though it was three or four years later," says Mendelson. "Because they were so young—I think they were six or seven or eight—when they did *Christmas*, they were maybe eleven, but they were still good."

A child actor can easily lose the qualities that make children's voices charming if he receives too much and/or the wrong kind of coaching. An overly "professional" performance can sound affected and lacking in spontaneity. Some memorable animated voices have been performed by novices—notably Peter Behn as Thumper in *Bambi*.

Andrew Stanton, who directed child actors for *Finding Nemo*, recalls, "When Pete Docter and I we were casting, we didn't want kids who sounded like they'd been coached incorrectly. I remember saying, 'Are all of these kids being taught to be precocious and overspoken and not real?' The big thing about a child sounding real is that they make mistakes. You're learning how to speak, not only verbally

but physically. Your tongue gets in the way of your teeth, and your brain is going faster than your mouth, and you have to stop and think in weird places. You stumble on your words."

"It's really rare to find a child actor who can memorize their lines, do all the work they need to do, and sound natural," agrees Docter. "Usually they sound very stilted—as though they're performing on a Broadway stage and they're aiming for the rafters. In my films, we've tried to cast based on the charm and believability of the kids—which gets us into trouble when we give them specific acting challenges. Because they've never acted before, making them believably sad or happy is tough. The *Peanuts* shows have a great texture to the voices. In *Up*, Jordan Nagai [as Russell] had that elusive quality to his voice, the way he spoke and the sort of innocence."

In *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Charlie Brown and Linus, who had to carry the story, were voiced by professional child actors Peter Robbins and Christopher Shea. Robbins already had a long list of credits that included *Rawhide* and *The Munsters* when he took the role of Schulz's perpetual loser.

"My agent called and said they were looking for voices for the *Peanuts* gang," Robbins explains. "I went on a cattle call interview with a hundred different kids. They didn't know what Charlie Brown sounded like, or Linus, or Pigpen, so I read for all those parts—and I got lucky.

"We recorded at Western Recorders, where The Doors and many other famous bands in Los Angeles recorded," he continues. "At the beginning they had six- to nine-year-olds running around the studio getting ready to do their lines. We played with the drum sets and tambourines. So that didn't work. Eventually we recorded our lines separately with Bill Melendez by the microphone and Lee Mendelson in the recording booth."

Sally Dryer, who was Violet in *A Charlie Brown Christmas* but who switched to Lucy for the next six specials, has similar memories of the recording sessions. "We'd get a script that we could review, but it really didn't make much sense to a little kid. We would sit across the table in a recording studio from Lee or Bill, they would say a line, and we would repeat it. Sometimes it would take five or even ten takes to say what they wanted, like 'Ble—ech! Dog lips!'
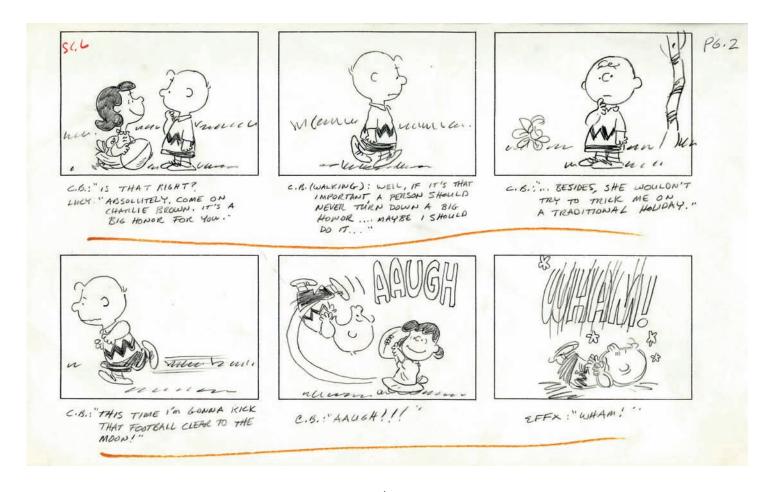
"As Violet, I had a couple lines that were nasty to Charlie Brown: I said something like, 'I didn't send you an invitation to my party, Charlie Brown,'" she adds. "The story of my promotion to Lucy—which may or may not be true—was that my voice had a particular quality of crabbiness to it that Schulz liked."

However, actors, animators, and fans agree that Christopher Shea's Linus remains the best of the *Peanuts* voices. Shea had a hint of a lisp that increased the feeling of the character's intelligence and sensitivity. His recitation of St. Luke remains instantly recognizable, decades later. Doug Sweetland says, "Linus's speech at the end of *A Charlie Brown Christmas* still stands out as one of my favorite moments. I've used that brilliant, understated acting in animation talks. A lot of times when you're an animator and you get a scene, you're trying to figure out 'What should I have the character do?' when 'What's the most truthful thing to do?' or 'What is all the character needs to do?' may be better questions."

Stephen Shea took over the role in 1971, after his older brother's voice had changed, performing it in *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* and *Snoopy, Come Home* (1972). "I never thought I sounded very much like Chris," Shea says. "He had such a great voice and a tonal quality that was unique. I could follow direction well enough. I stayed on for five years. But I don't think I ever really sounded like him.

"Once I had to give a classic 'AAAUGH!' kind of sound, and I just wasn't doing it right. There wasn't enough oomph to it," he recalls with a laugh. "After a number of different tries, Mr. Melendez said, 'Okay, someone's coming up to you,' and he actually took his big hands, put them around my throat, and said, 'WHAT WOULD YOU DO?!' I went 'AAAAAAAAUGH!!!' I made the sound perfectly, and he said, 'Cut. That's a take.'"

Spot illustrations:
Life Is a Circus, Charlie Brown, 1980
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

Like the other actors, Stephen Shea says, "Mr. Melendez had a really great way with kids. He would basically say, 'This is how I want you to say it,' and you'd repeat it. If you didn't quite get it, he'd tell you again, and you'd do it until you got it. Most times it went rather quickly." However, some of the children were so good at mimicking that Schulz noticed they were imitating the cadences of Melendez's Mexican accent. Lee Mendelson took over more of the coaching duties.

As Schulz introduced new characters into the strip, the animated cast expanded. Peppermint Patty made her on-screen debut in *You're in Love, Charlie Brown* (1967). Mendelson recalls, "When he brought in Peppermint Patty, we didn't know what she should sound like. We were at a hamburger joint one night and [producer] Walt DeFaria's daughter, Gail, who was nine, yelled, 'Pass the mustard!' We looked at each other and said, 'We've found our Peppermint Patty!' Later on, some girls did Peppermint Patty and some boys did Peppermint Patty—whoever had a gravelly voice."

One actor who did Peppermint Patty—and Marcie—was Mendelson's son, Jason, who began providing the voice of Rerun when he was about four in *It's an Adventure, Charlie Brown* (1983) and *The Charlie Brown and Snoopy Show* (1983–85).

"As I grew up, I talked so much, my voice was always hoarse, so at first I got to do Marcie, then Peppermint Patty because she had that hoarse, tomboy voice," he explains. "In

Opposite:
A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving, 1973
Storyboard
Artist unknown
Graphite

Above:
You're in Love, Charlie Brown, 1967
Production cel

Happy New Year, Charlie Brown [1986], I had to make a kissy noise at the very end of the show when Marcie kisses Charlie Brown. As a nine- or ten-year-old, this was weird: I'm a guy, I'm making a kissy noise, he's a guy. The kissy thing is embarrassing when you're a kid. When I saw the show, I had that dual feeling of, oh, that's me making that sound, but really it's Marcie, the girl with glasses who has a crush on Charlie Brown."

Some of the children were surprised when their neighbors and friends recognized their voices. Sally Dryer recalls, "I remember sitting in front of the little black-and-white TV, watching the show and thinking, 'I don't sound like that.' I knew it was me, but I'm not sure I connected all the dots. But the neighbors did. Apparently my mother got phone calls saying, 'Oh my God, we recognize that voice!'"

Stephen Shea remembers a few kids asking him where his blanket was after a special aired, but Peter Robbins had less enjoyable experiences: "The next day, I became the blockhead of the school. Kids would come up to me and say, 'Hey, somebody told me you're the voice of Charlie Brown. I know the voice of Charlie Brown, and you're not him.' I'd answer, 'Really? Good grief, you're an idiot!' That would stop them."

As the various actors grew older, their voices changed and they had to be replaced with younger children. Mendelson explains, "Instead of having agents send candidates over, we would go to different grammar schools. I found a whole cast in one fourth grade. We've probably done twenty or twenty-five casts over the years; most of them were recorded up here in Northern California.

"Because *Christmas* became so famous, we had to try to match those original voices," he continues. "Fortunately the Shea brothers sounded the same for ten years. But we matched them all pretty well, because when ABC airs two shows that were made thirty years apart, most of the time you can't tell the difference."

Only one cast member performed in all the specials and features: Bill Melendez, who supplied Snoopy's laughs, sobs, and howls.

"I found a great actor who had a very whimsical voice: I thought I needed a real offbeat voice for Snoopy," he explained. "But Sparky said, 'Nope. He's a dog; he barks and he does things, but he doesn't speak English.' I had to find a noise for Snoopy, so I start fooling around with the tape machine, going, *wow wrow*. I didn't want to just bark, but do something almost like speaking. Finally, I found a noise that was acceptable. I was going to bring in an actor and let him run with it. But we didn't have time. So they used my noises and everybody liked them—even Sparky. It was just a caricatured bark, speeded up so it sounded completely different. I laughed, I cried, I even did the Tarzan yell once. The Screen Actors Guild forced me to join: Now I get residual checks from doing Snoopy's voice!"

Making the Characters Move Believably

The Peanuts *characters were not designed for animation. Just try to make one of them turn slowly, or try to turn Charlie Brown's head on an angle or tilt. It's not round! And it's a different shape at every angle, with that little glob of hair on his forehead changing completely from front view to a profile. It was big trouble trying to make them turn slowly until we figured out how to start a turn and then zap to the last position.*
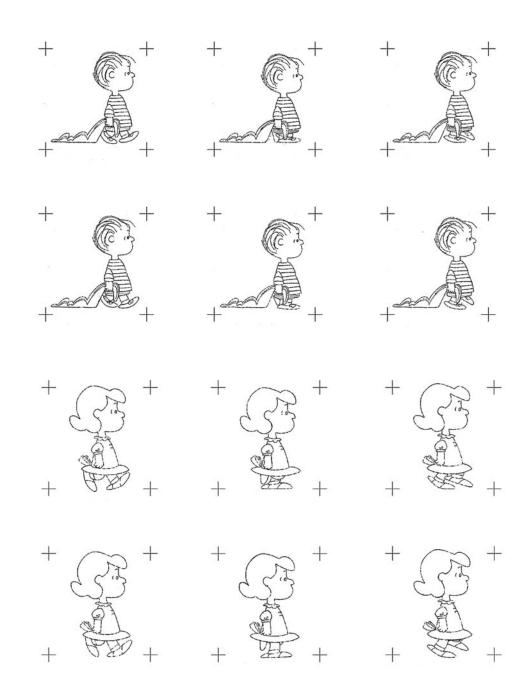
Bill Littlejohn, animator

Translating any character from the printed page to the screen poses myriad difficulties. Comic strip artists draw their characters in the poses and from the angles that look the best to them: Schulz usually drew Charlie Brown in either a profile, full-face, or three-quarter view. An animated character can't be limited to those "good" poses and angles. The animators have to turn the characters in space and move them in ways that may involve awkward drawings.

An artist's drawing is as uniquely personal as a signature; when a character is animated, many artists have to learn how to imitate that signature. Matt Groening once described the animation process on *The Simpsons* as "a roomful of people who draw better than I do trying to draw like I do."

"Having someone else draw the characters only I've drawn would absolutely terrify me," says *Frazz* cartoonist Jef Mallett. "My stuff isn't as minimal as Schulz's. My characters are lankier and they move more. They go off-balance. They give me more opportunities to make them look like they're moving. How do you put a *Peanuts* character off-balance? Their heads are so big they'd tip over. If I were Schulz, I would have been terrified to leave my characters in someone else's hands."

"When you see your characters animated, that's when they're characters, and they are shareable," adds Lynn Johnston. "You can share a comic strip, you can share a drawing, but you can't share the living motion, the speech, the eye contact, and the thought process that make them

Happiness Is a Warm Blanket, Charlie Brown, 2011
Matt Williames
Graphite

alive inside you. When it's animated, it's outside of you and you can be more objective about it. It's not you anymore, it's the characters. One time when [champion skater] Judy Sladky had brought Snoopy to life on ice, I could see Sparky separate himself from the character and say, 'You know, there was a time when there *was* no Snoopy.'"

The faith Schulz had in Melendez allayed some of those fears, although he often expressed regret that he couldn't go into the animation studio every day and supervise everything more closely.

Ironically, it was the very simplicity of Schulz's designs that made them so hard for the animators to draw. Most animated characters are composed of ovals and circles. If an animator knows that a character's head is essentially a sphere and that the bottom of the eyes should touch the equator, it's easier to draw the character consistently than trying to approximate the shapes freehand. But Schulz didn't construct the characters, he just drew them as he imagined them. Many animators ruefully comment that Schulz was the only person who could draw those characters well.

Disney animator Dale Baer, who worked on some of the *Peanuts* films, says, "We sit here and draw Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck and characters like that with no problem, but to draw Schulz's characters took a talent unto itself. Many people wouldn't say that, but just let them sit down and try to draw those guys, and they'll find out. You feel like you can't draw worth a darn when you work on those characters."

"Bugs Bunny is a more complex character, but learning how to draw Bugs on model is easier than doing Charles Schulz's work, because that's just how he drew. For anyone else, it's very difficult," explains David Silverman. "You have to figure out a rather complex way of constructing the characters. It's the same thing I faced on *The Simpsons*. Wes Archer and I had drawn the characters for *The Tracey Ullman Show*, but when the series expanded, we had to invent tricks so other people could draw the characters on model. We had to analyze what we'd been doing naturally."

Doug Sweetland adds, "I've heard people who have to animate Mickey Mouse say he's actually incredibly hard to draw. I think the *Peanuts* characters are probably even harder, because there are so few points of reference on the faces. If an eye is a little bit too far to the left or right, the whole thing looks off-model and falls apart. When Bill Melendez gave a talk at CalArts, he said those characters can't reach the top of their own heads. When the characters carried a raft over their heads in *It Was a Short Summer, Charlie Brown* (1969), the animators had to draw it from the side, so that they could stretch their arms up."

Melendez studied Schulz's drawing carefully and explored ways to make the familiar characters move in ways that fit the designs. "A normal human being might walk fast on twelve frames, and normally at about sixteen frames for each footfall," he explained. "But if you have these characters walk on sixteens, they're going to be floating. I made several experiments, and these kids, because of their size, have to walk on sixes: Every six frames is a step. Click, click, click."

"Schulz's designs were so simple they were hard," agrees animator Sam Jaimes. "To train new people how to work on them, we had to go over the model sheets with the artists and show them how to turn the characters. You turned them pretty quickly—you didn't do it like at Disney. They were difficult, but once you got the hang of it, they were fun."

As the specials repeated many situations from the strip, the animators often had to animate the same movements again and again. But unlike the Saturday morning kidvid houses, Melendez's artists didn't compile a "library" of movements to reuse. Phil Roman says, "Even if it's just Linus and Lucy walking across the screen, the characters are always in different situations. We used Lucy holding the football a lot, but we didn't use the drawings from a previous show. The characters changed slightly as they progressed. Sparky's drawings of them became more simplified. So it was a lot easier to start from scratch and let the animators do their thing. If you start using a lot of library stuff, it becomes trite and loses a lot of its freshness."

Schulz also watched the animation carefully and could be extremely critical of work he felt was poor or distorted the appearance of his characters. Roman recalls, "Sparky came to the studio one time; he was looking over the shoulder of one of the in-betweeners. He said, 'That drawing doesn't look good. That's off-model.' To get from one pose to another, Charlie Brown's nose kind of moves a little higher or lower as it turns, or the eyes do—and the in-betweens look bad. The animator said, 'Could you make a drawing?' He tried to do it, then said, 'Oh, that's okay—just do what you've got to.' You're not going to see that drawing anyway. You see the first one and the last one because you hold on to those; the in-between is just a transitory drawing."

Jeannie Schulz adds, "I remember Sparky saying, 'I told Bill I don't want him to use that animator again.' He knew who had animated which scenes. There was an animator who lived in France for a while, and Sparky said, 'Oh, he does marvelous work.' But he also picked out scenes he didn't like and said, 'Is that so-and-so again? Well, don't use her.' I think Bill pretty much adhered to what Sparky wanted. There were minor conflicts, but because they valued and truly liked each other, those pulls and tugs disappeared as soon as they happened."

Schulz praised Melendez's work, saying, "I think we have the set of characters and the imagination to do things, and they're much more difficult to do than we're sometimes given credit for. The animation festivals don't even invite us. I think what Bill does is much more difficult than drawing a bunch of funny lines on the screen, or dots chasing each other around, which they call 'animation art.'"

The one exception to the simple, difficult-to-animate characters that inhabited Schulz's world was Snoopy. The irrepressible beagle had longer limbs that could stretch more easily, large paws that suggested hands and feet, and an outsized, flexible nose that the artists could bend and twist for comic effect.

"Snoopy was a dream; he was my favorite," said Bill Littlejohn, who animated most of Snoopy's antics. "He's

Snoopy, Come Home, 1972
Woodstock Model sheet
Artist unknown
Graphite, blue pencil

crazy! There's no dialogue, just pantomime. He can do anything. When he does that happy dance, his head goes back and his whole body compresses into a kind of squash shape. You could stretch his arms out, not like the other characters with their short little arms."

"When you think about them, a lot of the specials have showcase scenes for animation that feature Snoopy," says Jeff Pidgeon. "Since they didn't give him a voice, he became a pantomime character—which gives them even more license to do fun things. I think many animators really relish the chance to allow their characters to express themselves purely through movement: Sometimes it's fun to let the movement do the talking. It was a really wise choice of Schulz's to not have him talk."

Doug Sweetland agrees, "I was surprised by how much of the specials is dedicated to silent comedy with Snoopy and Woodstock. It seems like the intention is to allow the audience some breathing room and just enjoy a performance. The trouble Snoopy has with the folding chair in the Thanksgiving special is very much like Chaplin. You could be watching any silent comedian having a problem with any ordinary object."

Melendez described Littlejohn as "the best animator that I've worked with, the most creative and productive." He continued, "I've had so many fliers come up to me and say, 'How did you know about a guy giving left rudder as he's taking off? That only happens if you're a flier from the old biplane days.' I tell them, 'Because the animator who did it was a flier. It was Bill Littlejohn.' It was such a great thing to have Snoopy get up there and fight with the Red Baron. And it came out real good."

"Littlejohn was famous for just taking off and doing whatever he felt like; Bill liked that he did that," production designer Evert Brown adds. "The storyboards weren't really that detailed. Littlejohn was also famous for not really planning his animation out, but just letting it happen. He could see it in his mind and draw it. He could hold to the scale of the character for a long period of time, which most animators

can't do. It's really difficult to hold on to the proportions of a character while you're animating, because things get bigger or smaller. But he was able to, and it was wonderful."

Jeannie Schulz sees an additional source of inspiration for Snoopy's capers: Bill Melendez. "Sparky loved all Bill's grand gestures," she explains. "You can see a lot of Bill in Snoopy. When Snoopy stands up—that's Bill. Bill was a character that Sparky really cared about, and Bill was what Sparky wasn't. He was bigger than life."

As his studio began producing not only the *Peanuts* specials, the first *Garfield* specials, and other projects, Melendez became too busy to pay proper attention to everything. He drafted animator Phil Roman to take over as director of the *Peanuts* shows. Roman had worked for a number of top directors, including Chuck Jones and Abe Levitow, before he began freelancing on *He's Your Dog, Charlie Brown* (1968).

Phil Roman also shared an unusual bond with Charles Schulz. Before he created *Peanuts*, Schulz worked as a teacher at Art Instruction Inc., a correspondence school in Minneapolis. "When I was a kid, I took the correspondence course because there were no art schools in Fresno," Roman recalls. "Charles Schulz was my instructor. So as a kid you're looking at a letter correcting your drawings, then you're working with the man—you're working with one of the giants.

"Bill put me on staff as an animator," Roman continues. "One day when I was animating on *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving*, Bill came in and laid this pile of papers on my desk. He said, 'I've gotten real busy on some other things. Maybe you can finish directing this picture.' So all of a sudden I had to analyze his style and how he timed things. I started working with the animators: I would time things out, do the exposure sheets, and do some posing of each scene—what the action was going to be. I guess Bill was happy with the way things were going, because he kept me on: I directed fourteen Charlie Brown specials and codirected two of the features."

Bill Melendez at his drafting table.

One change Roman made was in the credits for the specials. Melendez had lumped all the artists together under the heading "Graphic Blandishment," which Roman felt was inappropriate. "I said, 'Bill, these guys are proud of what they do. They're animators. They're designers. They're background painters. I think they should be given the credit as such.' So he changed it. I thought it was fair, especially to the animators and the designers, the ones who actually got the drawings on the screen. I made sure everybody got credit for what they did."

For years, the Melendez Studio occupied three adjacent houses on Larchmont Boulevard in Los Angeles. It was a pleasant, informal setting that the artists remember fondly. Dale Baer recalls, "It was nice pulling up to the studio, this quaint little house in a neighborhood. You'd walk in and you felt at home. Everybody was busy. Bill was there and he was reachable. He wasn't one of those guys behind closed doors someplace."

Carole Barnes, who served as Melendez's head of checking for thirty-nine years, adds, "The studio had a family atmosphere, and that's the way Bill wanted it. There was always a party after every show. It was just the way he felt about his employees: They were his family."

Melendez had been an active participant in the bitterly fought strike that led to the unionization of the Disney Studio in 1941. He was reluctant to lay anyone off, even during slow periods. Barnes adds, "I remember a couple of times going to him and saying, 'Bill, there's no work. I can find work somewhere else.' But he'd say, 'No—when I need you, I'll need you. I don't want you somewhere else where I have to pry you away.'"

Melendez also made a point of paying his artists equitably. Sound film moves through the projector at the rate of 1.5 feet per second, and animators figure the length of their scenes by footage, rather than time: a 15-foot scene, rather than a 10-second one. Freelance animators—and some studio artists—are paid on the basis of the footage they produce. "In some studios, you have the problem of animators making friends with the production manager so they get simple scenes they can do quickly because it's all paid at the same rate," says animator Dave Brain. "But Bill had figured out a fairer way, and that was to rate the scenes. A good average scene, maybe a half shot so you didn't have to deal with the whole body, moderate animation—that would be paid at the rate per foot times 1.0. If there was a little bit more to draw, 1.5. If you got a scene with four characters, you might get to multiply that rate by 3 or 4."
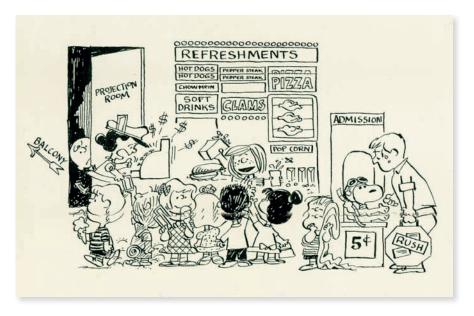
Melendez never lost his love of animating and would do some scenes himself, even when he was directing and/or producing a show. Brain continues, "Bill would say to [director] Larry Leichliter, 'Give me a couple of scenes.' The poses were good, but by then his hand was wiggly. Larry would just clean the lines up: It was still Bill's scene. Bill was in his early eighties then, and he always had a scene on the desk."

The Move to the Big Screen
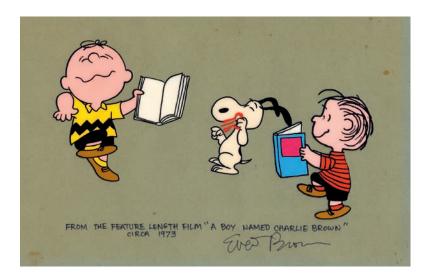
When I saw Snoopy, Come Home*, I remember feeling so upset that Snoopy and Charlie Brown were separated for such a chunk of time in the film. It was not what I expected to feel when I went to see a* Peanuts *special or a* Peanuts *feature. I remember sitting in the theater in my big movie seat and feeling, "This is not good. This has got to get better for Snoopy."*
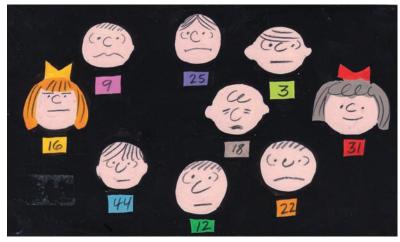
Andrew Stanton, director, *Finding Nemo*

From the mid-'60s through the '70s, American animation went through what Charlie Brown might describe as a "blah" period. The great Hollywood cartoon studios had closed. After Walt Disney's death in 1966, his studio seemed to sleepwalk through features like *The Aristocats* (1970) and *Robin Hood* (1973). But an unlikely quartet of features suggested new approaches to the animated film and excited audiences about the art form: *Yellow Submarine* (1968), *Fantasia* (in rerelease in 1969), *Fritz the Cat* (1972), and *A Boy Named Charlie Brown* (1969).

A Boy Named Charlie Brown, 1969
A print ad showing the gang running a movie theater.

Top:
A Boy Named Charlie Brown, 1969
Charlie Brown, Snoopy, and Linus
performing "I Before E Except after C"
Production cel

Bottom:
A Boy Named Charlie Brown, 1969
Dean Spille
Gouache

The flamboyant psychedelic imagery of Heinz Edelmann's designs in *Yellow Submarine* and Disney's great visual experiment *Fantasia* (which was marketed as "the ultimate trip") demonstrated the still largely untapped visual potential of the medium. *Fritz* introduced material that was darker, more violent, more sexually and racially charged than previous American features. *Charlie Brown* proved that a modest animated film with an involving story and beloved characters could score a major success.

Making *A Boy Named Charlie Brown* was a long, uphill battle. Lee Mendelson recalls that he, Schulz, and Melendez had initially discussed the idea of a *Peanuts* feature in 1965, before the first special had aired. But the participants agreed that they weren't ready to tackle such an ambitious project, and no motion picture distributor was interested.

Two years later, they began talking again, as both Mendelson and Schulz were unhappy about the lack of family-oriented films they could watch with their children. Once again, the major studios turned them down. But CBS, the network that broadcast the *Peanuts* specials, had recently established a motion picture company, Cinema Center Films. A deal was struck, and *A Boy Named Charlie Brown* opened on December 4, 1969, at Radio City Music Hall to good reviews and good business.

In the *New York Times*, Vincent Canby wrote, "The pleasures of the film are the delicate, unspectacular ones of the original comic strip: Snoopy's fantasizing that his dog house is a Sopwith Camel, Linus's going to pieces when he loses his blanket (his "spiritual tourniquet"), or Charlie Brown's irritation when he finds the pitcher's mound covered by dandelions." Kevin Thomas said in the *Los Angeles Times* that the film "should please *Peanuts* fans of all ages with its familiar wry whimsy."

Pixar art director Ralph Eggleston recalls, "The first few times I saw *A Boy Named Charlie Brown* as a kid, I just enjoyed it as a film. I found it really emotional. Doing a twenty-two-minute special is one thing, but in stretching it out to a feature, it could have come across as just another series of comic strips tied together, which a lot of it is. But they found a really strong character-driven story."

"The features were very powerful for me: I've never forgotten them, because I felt like Schulz had a real commitment to not trivialize his material," adds fellow Pixar artist Jeff Pidgeon. "*A Boy Named Charlie Brown* is about how to confront failure, and how you can work really hard and care about something very much and still keep going if you lose. Most movies are about winning: If your heart's

A Boy Named Charlie Brown, 1969
Dean Spille
Gouache

in it, you'll win. I don't think it's a bad idea to introduce the concept of failure to people: You're not going to succeed at everything you do in life. You need to be prepared for failure, and your friends will be there. I thought that was very powerful."

"*A Boy Named Charlie Brown* was quite a leap for Bill; for all of us, really," says Mendelson. "It's quite a jump from a half hour to ninety minutes. I think the mistake was to go to ninety minutes, because back then, it would equate to a two-hour television special. All the great Disney movies are about seventy-five minutes. When it went to television, we cut it down to seventy-five—and made it a better film. Although the films did okay, they never had the success that the television shows did."

Schulz expressed similar sentiments, complaining that the length of the film was imposed arbitrarily by the distributor. "They give you a time limit saying the film must run seventy-five minutes. Well, that's absurd to set a time limit on something. You either have to stretch it out to make the seventy-five minutes or you have to reduce it to some time limit, and that's always bad. We've learned how

to handle it but we suffered because of it, and I think our films have been better when we've gone back and trimmed them for running on television."

In *A Boy Named Charlie Brown*, Schulz expanded a series of strips he'd drawn in February of 1966, in which Charlie Brown entered a citywide spelling bee. In the print version, he missed his first word, spelling "maze" M-A-Y-S; in the film, he's given familiar words ("failure," "insecure") and progresses to the national spelling bee in New York City. After he loses by misspelling "beagle," he withdraws into his room. Linus persuades him to come out, pointing out that even though he lost, the world didn't come to an end.

Although the film had a strong central story, the filmmakers included striking fantasy sequences that suggest the influence of *Yellow Submarine* and the experimental films of John Hubley, whom Melendez greatly admired. As Schroeder performs the second movement of Beethoven's *Pathétique Sonata*, the colors shift to introduce a fantasy evocation of the baroque churches in the composer's native Germany. When Linus and Snoopy join Charlie Brown in New York, Snoopy skates onto the ice at Rockefeller Center and imagines himself playing hockey—against a background of rotoscoped human hockey players.

"Although they had a strong story, they made time for the other stuff: the Beethoven, the ice skating," says Eggleston enthusiastically. "Where today do you get to stop a film to have visuals like that for three to four minutes? It's candy for the eyes! It doesn't particularly slow down the story, and even if it does, no one cares, because you pick it up again right after that and you've had a great time watching. The almost Day-Glo colors, and the stars when Snoopy's silhouetted against the beautiful graphic images—it's always appealed to me."

"In the Beethoven scene with Schroeder, there are those abstract pictures of various churches and various places in the area where Beethoven grew up," adds Pidgeon. "I'm not really sure of the significance of them, exactly. But it brought a mood to that sequence that was really different, even from the specials."

Re-creating Schulz's World

One thing that always stood out for me was the backgrounds. They had these vividly colored, painterly looking backgrounds, like the schoolyard with the twisted fence and the snow in A Charlie Brown Christmas. *In the Halloween show, there were the piles of leaves and the lovely watercolor skies. I try to get that effect sometimes in my own stuff. It just sort of woke you up on the screen without seeming out of place.*

Richard Thompson, cartoonist, *Cul de Sac*

Adapting the colors and backgrounds from the strips for the features and TV specials posed difficulties that paralleled the ones involved in translating the characters. In the first years of *Peanuts*, Schulz had sometimes drawn rooms filled with midcentury furniture and other elaborate backgrounds rendered in perspective. But as the strip progressed, he placed his characters in increasingly minimal settings. If Linus watched TV, a television set and a chair were all that was needed to indicate a living room; a few lines suggesting tufts of grass showed that the characters were outside.

In 1970, Schulz wrote that good cartooning is essentially good design: "You have to place the things within these four panels so that you break the areas up into nice shapes. I have discovered that, because of the type of humor in Charlie Brown, the drawings must remain simple. . . . And I rarely do any backgrounds. Keeping it all very simple is the key here."

But animated characters need an environment to move through, and Schulz's characters lived in a neighborhood that suggested a pleasant Midwestern suburb. For the specials and films, the background and layout artists had to expand Schulz's vision without spoiling it.

"The strip was very minimal, but there was a lot there to work with: Basically, we were keying off Schulz's designs from the strip," explains Evert Brown. "We were able to draw out a lot of things from that, even though it was minimal. He just wanted to keep the eye directed toward the joke or the idea he was pushing across, and didn't want to make the setting too cumbersome.

"In a lot of cartoons, over the years, they have created sets—this is the way this room looks," he continues. "I don't think we ever worried about that. There was never much in the rooms. If Charlie Brown is standing at the telephone, there's just a telephone and a little desk. Very simple. Even within the houses, there was never any distinction—this is Linus's house and this is Charlie Brown's house or anything like that."

Animator/director Sam Jaimes adds, "We would reach back to Schulz's drawings in the comic strip. If we were doing a scene with Charlie Brown in his bedroom, we would do a little research and find the way Schulz would do it. In cases where something had to be more elaborate, we just added to it. But we tried to keep to the feeling of the strip and not go too far beyond it."

Dean Spille, who painted the backgrounds, lived in various places in Europe during several of the productions. Phil Roman recalls, "We would send him a storyboard—now you can do this in the computer, but we had to ship it. He would set up little keys of each sequence, how it's going to look, the colors. We would approve them, then find out how many backgrounds we'd need. He would paint them and send them. I liked Dean's backgrounds, which were very simple but colorful. They had a unique look, because we didn't want just flat colors."

"They just gave me the storyboard, and I would go through it and do a little color sketch for each scene. I'd do two of them and give one to the studio; the second I'd keep for myself to refer to," says Spille. "The layouts were often done by Bernard Gruver, Ed Levitt, and Evert Brown. Each of these great layout artists had his own distinctive drawing style, so there were differences in the trees, buildings, landscapes et cetera. When it came to time to transfer the layouts onto background paper, they would be filtered through my personal style—which seemed agreeable to everyone.

"I tried to keep them more as colored drawings than paintings, to be compatible with the strips," he continues. "In the earliest shows, the backgrounds were painted in opaque cel vinyl. But because of the dramatic watercolor skies, I shifted to transparent watercolor. That was faster, as there were often deadlines. I used a black pencil, which I thought wouldn't be quite as strong a line as on the inked characters: It would create a little bit of difference between them in space. There were no problems with my being away from the studio, although I worried about the post sometimes."

The system of mailing the sketches and backgrounds back and forth may seem almost comically dated four decades later, but it functioned smoothly. "It was very difficult," Carole Barnes comments. "We'd have to have dupes of all the layouts. I always tried to give him sketches of where the characters were in relation to the background. It was quite a job, but we never missed a deadline."

The results speak for themselves. Schulz's son Craig says, "Bill was visionary in a lot of that background stuff. It's almost subliminal, because when you watch the specials, you don't realize how many times the backgrounds are simply one color or these great montages of color that come out of nowhere. It's not like a typical background; he was inventive on that sort of stuff."

The artists at UPA had pushed the use of color in animated films during the years Melendez spent there. Instead of the realistic palette adapted from nineteenth-century European storybook illustration that Walt Disney favored, the UPA artists looked to the work of Picasso, Matisse, Miró, and Modigliani for inspiration. They experimented with bolder, often unconventional colors. The artists at Melendez's studio continued those experiments, juxtaposing lush watercolor skies with simple color cards.

Their work made a strong impression on Disney art director Paul Felix, who says, "My earliest memories of the specials are of the settings they took place in. I was pretty familiar with the story lines because I had read all the comics, but seeing those settings translated into color made

the biggest impression. They included just enough detail to set one character's room apart from other rooms. There's more detail, say, in Lucy's room than in the living rooms. But there was so much done with the expressionistic use of color: They chose that as the differentiator as opposed to what was in the rooms.

"In *Great Pumpkin*, there are some really amazing combinations of color, especially after Snoopy has crash landed. There's a sunset behind a field of trees, which is one of the only times you see linear perspective in the show," he continues. "It's striking because it's flat and implies dimensionality at the same time. *A Charlie Brown Christmas* also has some really strong decisions about color that remind me of UPA. When Linus is alone in the auditorium before he gives his speech about Christmas, there's a wild red and saturated yellow background that has a real flatness to it. But its flatness creates a huge visual space. It describes deep, but it looks flat: That tension is really interesting to me."

The shift to feature production required some rethinking of the approach to the backgrounds. The larger screen offered

It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, 1966
Dean Spille
Graphite, gouache

greater visual possibilities, and audiences would demand more elaborate production values for a feature film than a TV special. Ultimately, the designers and painters modified their work a little, but they remained faithful to the basic look of the strip and Schulz's concern that the backgrounds should never overpower the characters.

"Melendez and his artists gave the characters an environment that was believable: You could still believe the characters had black lines around them, but they didn't necessarily have to have black lines around all the grass and houses," says animator Eric Goldberg. "Yet it was simple enough and had enough production value to give it more scope. I thought they were very successful in expanding their look in *A Boy Named Charlie Brown*."

"Schulz would put in just enough detail for you to realize you were in a room, and the necessary props, but it was really stripped down to almost nothing," agrees Jeff Pidgeon. "The backgrounds are obviously far less minimal in the animated specials, but they're still minimal in a lot of ways. The features were a little different. When they go to New York in *A Boy Named Charlie Brown*, I really felt like the kids went somewhere else."
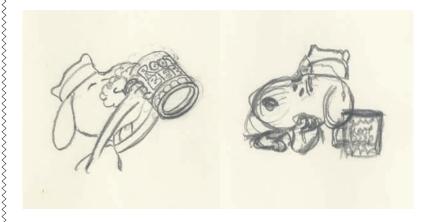
The kids went even farther in the fourth and final *Peanuts* feature. *Bon Voyage, Charlie Brown (And Don't Come Back!)* sent Linus, Marcie, Peppermint Patty, Charlie Brown, and Snoopy to France as exchange students. The 1980 film was inspired by a trip Charles and Jeannie Schulz took with Bill Melendez and his wife to France. The Schulzes had gone to a reunion of his World War II unit and discovered some of the men had revisited the château where they had been stationed during the war. Although Schulz disliked traveling, he enjoyed the trip.

"When we got to the château, it was boarded up, with weeds this high," Jeannie Schulz recalls. "In the little town, Sparky went into the café, and said to the proprietor, 'In *la guerre*'—because he didn't speak French—'In *la guerre*, I was here.' And the man said, '*En la guerre*, I was here!' This was thirty years later. They had a little foosball game, and

Sparky said, 'I played this game here!' And the man said, 'No, no, no. *En la guerre*, it was over there.'"

She continues, "We went back the next year, but the château had been rented and was all cleaned up. We rode down to the café, hoping that we would see that same proprietor, but they had turned it into two little apartments. If he had gone back a year later to find that place and seen it all changed, it would not have evoked the same feelings—and the idea for *Bon Voyage* came out of that experience."

Schulz made sketches and Melendez took photographs, which the studio artists used for reference when they made the film. The little café where Schulz played foosball became the one Snoopy visits as a World War II G.I., slurping root beer and listening to the jukebox. Roman adds, "The characters aren't just in their little rooms in their neighborhood. You're setting up a bigger picture: When they're in France, Snoopy and Woodstock go into that bar and start drinking root beer. Littlejohn animated that part. Snoopy's laughing, and

he gets sad. I don't think it would have worked on a half-hour show, but in a feature, it was part of a bigger story."

Bon Voyage also featured on-screen adults, something the filmmakers had always avoided. "We had to show the firemen and the owner coming back, but not close-ups," Roman explains. "They're just images to suggest there are other people. There were movers in *Is This Goodbye, Charlie*

Brown? But again, they're minimal. You put them in when you need them. When you don't need them, you don't."

Schulz and Melendez later used the ending of *Bon Voyage, Charlie Brown* as the setup for the most challenging of the specials from a visual standpoint, *What Have We Learned, Charlie Brown?* (1983), subtitled "A Tribute." Schulz wrote that he kept thinking about the characters driving to Paris and the airport at the end of *Bon Voyage, Charlie Brown*: "It might be interesting if they got lost on this little trip and somehow end up at Omaha Beach and the scenes of the famous D-Day invasion of World War II. I even thought that they might pass through Belgium and we could show some landscapes affected by World War I, and how emotional it could be if one of the characters could be made to recite John McCrae's immortal poem, 'In Flanders Fields.'"

Schulz continued to mull over the idea, and found his inspiration the next year, during a sleepless night in the hospital after his coronary bypass surgery. He said, "I knew if I could just get one phrase, I could tie the whole thing together. All of a sudden the line 'What have we learned, Charlie Brown?' came to me. This helped everything else fall into place, and as soon as I got home I called Bill Melendez, the animator, and we agreed that we had something really new and different to add to television cartoon programming."

Melendez recalled, "Sparky wanted to do something about the Second World War, something he thought would be very good, and would run every year on Memorial Day. I said, 'Sparky, I can't animate the landing in Normandy. This is a monster job.' 'Well, you've got to do it somehow.' So I solved it by rotoscoping a lot of live action, and marrying it to footage of Linus. It was more a labor of love than trying to do a really good story."

As Schulz had imagined, Linus, Snoopy, Peppermint Patty, Marcie, and Charlie Brown get lost after leaving the château that appears in *Bon Voyage*. Linus realizes they're near Omaha Beach. The characters visit the American Cemetery; Linus recites part of "In Flanders Fields" and quotes General Eisenhower—a hero of Schulz's—who is also

Opposite:
Bon Voyage, Charlie Brown, 1980
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

What Have We Learned, Charlie Brown?, 1983
Production cel

heard on the soundtrack. The drawn characters appear in front of processed live action of the American invasion while Linus explains the events.

"*What Have We Learned Charlie Brown?* was the hardest one to get on the network, for obvious reasons," says Mendelson. "Sparky was a very patriotic guy. That patriotism led him to pay tribute to the soldiers. He said, 'Let's have the kids go back to Normandy.' I'm saying to myself, 'Oh my God. This is going to be a beautiful thing, but it may end up on PBS—if that!' But we went ahead and did it, and they liked it, and it went on the air."

"I thought it ended up real good; I was startled that the network didn't seem to like it," Melendez sighs. "But the networks don't seem to like anything I like. I've come to realize I can't second-guess these people. They know what's commercially viable and attractive and whatnot, so I let them do their job. But I'm always surprised that our tastes are so different."

"Linus and Lucy:" *Peanuts'* Theme Song

There is a mixture of sadness and joy in the Peanuts *characters. Their all-too-human disappointments and minor triumphs are reflected in Guaraldi's music. It is a child's reality.*
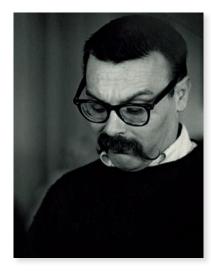
Dave Brubeck, jazz musician

Animation and music have been closely linked since the silent film era. Beginning in 1924, the Fleischer Studio produced a series of "Song Car-Tunes" that showed the lyrics to popular songs while the audience sang along with the theater organist or orchestra. Paul Hindemith composed a score (now lost) for *Felix at the Circus* in 1926–27. Shortly after Mickey Mouse made his debut in *Steamboat Willie* (1928), Disney began a series of music-oriented fantasies, the "Silly Symphonies." The UPA artists and the Hubleys sought to infuse their films with the energy and spontaneity of jazz.

A Charlie Brown Christmas would need music, but who would compose it and what would it sound like? The classic Hollywood cartoon had sophisticated scores by Carl Stalling, Milt Franklyn, Raymond Scott, et al., recorded by the studio orchestras. During the '60s, most TV cartoons featured undistinguished orchestral music.

Mendelson recalls, "In 1963, after filming the Schulz documentary, I was trying to think of what music we could use, especially over the few minutes of animation. I decided jazz might be a good choice, and called Cal Tjader—whom I had gone to school with—but he was too busy. While pondering what to do next, I heard 'Cast Your Fate to the Wind' by Vince as I drove over the Golden Gate Bridge. I called jazz critic Ralph Gleason at the *San Francisco Chronicle* and asked if he could get me in touch with Guaraldi. Vince and I met a few days later and within a few weeks the song 'Linus and Lucy' was born. It went on to become our theme song for the next half century."

The recording sessions held some surprises. Melendez said, "Instead of using a symphony orchestra, we had this funny little four-piece combo. I showed Vince the picture

Vince Guaraldi, 1965.

and my bar sheets. I said, 'Here—you can go by those.' He asked, 'What is that?' 'Bar sheets! See—everything's twelve frames or twenty-four frames, and you can write the music to them.' He said, 'I can't read music. Just tell me.' He looked at the storyboard and said, 'Okay.' When we were recording, he said, 'How many yards of music do you want for that?' Then he would play that theme or piece."

Guaraldi's jazz score immediately became an essential component of the *Peanuts* specials and films. The soundtrack album from *A Charlie Brown Christmas* was a huge success, and the music was later covered by an impressive roster of jazz artists. Brubeck comments, "Guaraldi's approach to the music was perfect. It was touching without being overly sentimental. The Christmas tunes themselves are evocative and do not need to be embellished to tug at the heartstrings."

The score also delighted generations of young artists and musicians who grew up with the *Peanuts* specials. Devo cofounder Mark Mothersbaugh comments, "Guaraldi's music was the total opposite of, say, Carl Stalling's, which was painstakingly sculpted to the Warner Bros. cartoons, frame by frame. Vince came at it from a different direction: He let the music flow. Although the music style was totally different, it was more like playing to a silent movie, back in the days of the pianist sitting at the side of the screen. You get the feeling that he was playing as he went along. He made a very valid case for that style of composing. I think it had a very warming effect for the show."

"I grew up in a family of musicians where piano lessons were just a given part of growing up," agrees Jef Mallett.

The instrument used for Schroeder's performance of "Jingle Bells" for Lucy, 1965.

"One of the reasons I liked playing the piano was the thought that maybe someday I could play like That Guy on the *Peanuts* specials. I started out wanting to play like Schroeder, but I quickly learned I wanted to play like Vince Guaraldi. I tried to convince my mother to find me some of the *Peanuts* music that I could play. She explained not every song has sheet music and that this stuff is really, really hard. She told me how long and how much practice it would take to be able to play anything close to what Vince Guaraldi played in the *Peanuts* specials."

"There's so many things in *Phineas and Ferb* that you can trace back directly to stuff we learned watching the *Peanuts* shows," adds Jeff Marsh. "Their use of really wonderful, minimal music, and the effect it has on you as a viewer. I have all that stuff on my iPod and listen to it regularly. One of the things I thought about when I was creating music for *Phineas and Ferb* is I can still hum 'Linus and Lucy.' As soon as you hear it, you're immediately back there with the characters."

One unexpected musical success came out of the disastrous preliminary screening, when the filmmakers thought *A Charlie Brown Christmas* was a failure. Mendelson was struck by the beauty of Guaraldi's opening theme, which was an instrumental.

"I thought, 'That's such a pretty melody; maybe we could find somebody to put words to it,'" he said. "I called every songwriter I could think of, and they were all busy. I sat down at the kitchen table in desperation: I put dots for the short notes and dashes for the long notes on the back of an envelope, and I wrote the poem 'Christmastime Is Here' in one take. I went to Guaraldi, who'd been working with some kids in the Bay Area. He said, 'Maybe we can have the kids record this.' That song's been covered a hundred times, from Tony Bennett to Mariah Carey."

The collaboration with Guaraldi was apparently as happy as it was successful. Phil Roman adds, "When I became a director, all of a sudden I was dealing with Vince Guaraldi, who can't read music. They got John Scott Trotter, who was Bing Crosby's music director on the radio, to come in. He and I would talk over the music and the cues, how long they would be, then he would explain it musically to Vince. I got to work with some real giants in the business early on, with Sparky and Vince, and with John Scott Trotter and Bill and Lee."

Guaraldi died suddenly in February, 1976. Roman says, "On weekends he used to play at a club down on the peninsula. He had told Lee that he felt his heart was a problem; Lee told him to see a doctor. But the doctor told him, 'Don't worry about it, it's just heartburn.' That night, he played the first set, and they were staying at the hotel next door. He said, 'I'm going to take a break between sets.' When it was time to continue, he didn't come back. So they went looking for him, and he was already dead."

After Guaraldi's death, Ed Bogas and Desirée Goyette did music for some of the specials and the Saturday morning series *The Charlie Brown and Snoopy Show*, which ran for eighteen episodes. Later, they moved on to do the music for the *Garfield* shows.

During the late '80s, Mendelson reached out to jazz pianist David Benoit. "I had been listening to him on the radio for a long time, and I really enjoyed his music; for me, he was the closest thing to Vince," Mendelson explains. "So when we decided to do *This Is America, Charlie Brown* [1988–89], I went after David, as well as Wynton Marsalis, Dave Brubeck, Dave Grusin, and George Winston. When we had the opportunity to do new shows at ABC, we signed David for the long haul."

Benoit says he felt a kinship with one of the *Peanuts* characters: "Vince's music wasn't just happy-go-lucky; it had a certain melancholy. When you listen to 'Christmastime Is Here,' the intervals in that piece just get to your heart. That was a big part of who Charlie Brown was, and I identified with him and that little bit of melancholy. As a kid, I was so Charlie Brown. I couldn't play baseball, I didn't have any friends, I never got a valentine. Maybe Vince was like that. He got the joy, but the melancholy, too."

Benoit remembers some jazz critics objecting to the idea of another artist attempting to take over Guaraldi's role. But Schulz, Melendez, and Mendelson all liked his work and supported him. "They pretty much let Vince play his thing, and they would make it fit to the picture," Benoit says. "When they brought me in, I already had some experience scoring films. Once they had a pencil test, I would take the time-coded VHS tape, hook it up to my computer, and write the music to it. I would watch the show with Lee or Bill, and they'd give me a few notes. I've been in meetings with directors where they have specific ideas and go through every bar with you. Bill and Lee were pretty intuitive and easy to work with."
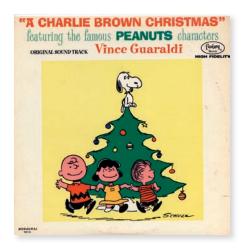
After some experiments with orchestration, Benoit discovered that Guaraldi's use of a small jazz combo had been an inspired choice. "In later years, I went back to the Guaraldi piano trio idea, which was sophisticated but simple, like Charlie Brown," he says. "I found out how well it worked, especially with the kids' voices. Vince was a guy who loved kids and knew how to write music for them. So I followed his lead there; trying to add saxophones and other instruments would get in the way of the kids' dialogue."
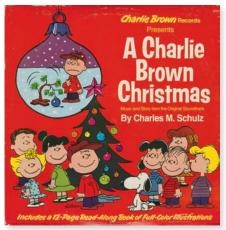
A Boy Named Charlie Brown featured a Guaraldi score and three songs by Rod McKuen. The title song, "A Boy Named Charlie Brown," was nominated for an Oscar, but lost to the Beatles' "Let It Be." However, the enthusiasm critics had shown for the film did not extend to the songs. Vincent Canby wrote, "The only really dreadful contribution to the film is that of Rod McKuen, whose three songs (including one called 'Failure Face') can barely be endured."

In a 1971 interview in *Penthouse*, Schulz confessed he had never seen a finished version of the recently released special, *Play It Again, Charlie Brown* (1971): "It's my own fault; I just don't go there often enough and work carefully with them." But Schulz went on to say that he would try to make up for it on the next movie: "The story is completed and I have written the entire show and blocked out every scene myself, I've created all the funny business for the entire thing, and if it doesn't work it will be only my fault—my inability to translate what I want to the animators, so they can turn it out. This is where it gets lost, as I discuss what I want with the director, and he takes my wishes and has to impose them on the animators. . . . But I think this will be a better movie than the first one. It has a better story and it flows better."
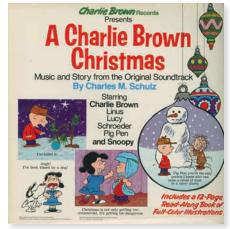
Schulz's evaluation was correct: *Snoopy, Come Home* (1972) was a better film with a stronger story. The basic plot came from a series he had drawn in August 1968. Snoopy receives a letter from Lila, a little girl in the hospital who wants to see him. He rushes to visit her, leaving behind a very puzzled Charlie Brown. Linus checks with the Daisy Hill Puppy Farm and explains to Charlie Brown that Lila was Snoopy's first owner, but had to give him up: "You got a used dog." For the film, Schulz expanded the story: After seeing Lila, Snoopy decides to stay with her. At the tear-drenched farewell party, he leaves his books, records, and other possessions to the regular characters. But Lila's family lives in an apartment building where no dogs are allowed, so he's able to return to Charlie Brown (and reclaim his "gifts").
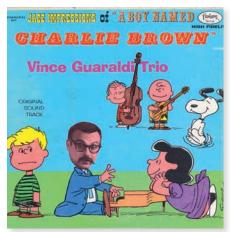
Instead of the familiar Guaraldi jazz, the filmmakers opted for a song-score, and brought in Robert and Richard Sherman, who had written the songs for *Mary Poppins*, *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*, *The Jungle Book*, and *The Aristocats*, among a host of others. Mendelson says, "The Sherman brothers' music was spectacular. We needed some big-screen element, and that's what they brought. It was a departure from the jazz music, but we determined after the first movie that it was too similar to the television shows. When I called them,
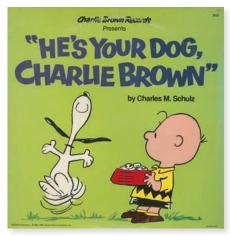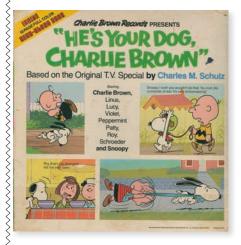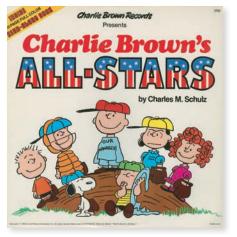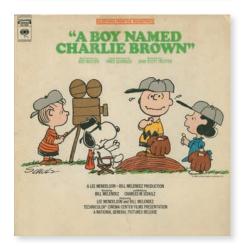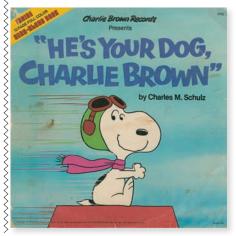
it was very exciting for me because they were the number one people in town at the time."

At their first meeting, Mendelson, Melendez, and the Shermans agreed that they wanted the lyrics to tell the story, as the songs in *Mary Poppins* had. However, they couldn't sign a deal until Schulz approved their handling of his characters and story.

Richard Sherman recalls, "They asked, 'Would you take a shot at writing a song or two? We'll tell you some of the situations, and then we'll play them for Sparky.' We felt it was such an important project and they were such nice guys, we'd take a shot—on spec. We didn't even discuss money. We just said, 'We want to do it.'

"The premise of the story got me completely: Snoopy is very happy at home when he gets a letter from Lila, a little girl who's in the hospital," he continues, touching his heart. "She misses him. She's lonely for him. He's torn. My heart's going OH! Robert and I said, 'Instead of having a letter, we'll write a song, which will be the letter.' We really poured ourselves into it, and we wrote the song 'Do You Remember Me?' It was hard, because it sounds like a love song, but it's about a girl and her dog. We came up with a song we liked a lot, and we got Shelby Flint to make a demo of it. Then we took 'Snoopy Come Home' and made a little gag song out of it."

Melendez and Mendelson liked the songs, but insisted that the Shermans come with them to Santa Rosa to play the demo recordings. The brothers enjoyed meeting Schulz but were surprised when he took them over to the adjacent Redwood Empire Ice Arena to hear the records.

Sherman continues, "He said, 'I want to skate when I hear it.' Nobody's there except a guy in the sound booth. Schulz brings the record up to him, says, 'Play this,' and puts his ice skates on. Bob and I are rather bewildered, but he wants to visualize how it feels and if it's right. They played the first song. Around and around he went on the ice: three minutes. When it was through, he said, 'Play it again.' Around and around he went. After a while he came around and gave us

a thumbs-up with a big smile. He said, 'Play the other one!' He skated faster on that one. When it was done, he sat down and said, 'We'll have to have a few more songs, you know.' He looked at Lee and Bill and said, 'Great. Good choice.' So we were in, and didn't have to demonstrate on the ice anymore."

Mendelson recalls: "At one point, they brought in six songs. This is the Sherman brothers, this is Mount Olympus! I didn't like any of the songs. I went to Sparky and said, 'What am I going to do? I can't tell the Sherman brothers that I don't like their songs.' He said, 'Well, just have a meeting and discuss it with them.' I went in with much trepidation and said, 'I'm sorry, but these six songs just don't work right yet.' They both said, 'No problem. We'll start over.' Three weeks later they came in with six songs that were perfect. I always admired them for that. They could have said, 'Hey, we're the Sherman brothers—*you're* going to tell *us* what's good music?'"

"We'd suggest an idea, and if Lee didn't cotton to it, we'd say, 'Great—we'll do something else,'" Sherman replies. "If you're a writer, that's what you do. The eraser is the greatest tool that any writer has."

The high point of the film occurs when a little girl named Clara assumes Snoopy is a stray dog, so she grabs him and ties him up. She changes his name to "Rex," gives him a bath, puts him in a dress, and serves him tea. Bill Littlejohn did hilarious animation of Snoopy fussing with his dress, trying to keep the tea from spilling on it. The sequence is set to an upbeat Sherman brothers song, "Fundamental-Friend-Dependability."

"Jamming words together has always been something Bob and I enjoyed doing," Sherman says. "Clara was just a jabbermouth. When we were looking at the storyboards, Bill Melendez would talk fast when he was doing her. We were playing around with 'friendship' and so-and-so, and I said, 'One word: Fundamentalfriendependability.' We had to hyphenate it so you could read it. It seemed to work very nicely for the situation. She's bathing him: 'Scrubby dubby dub, I'll rub you in the tub. That's fundamental-friend-dependability.' I see a

What Have We Learned, Charlie Brown?, 1983
Production cel

Flashbeagle, 1984
Production cel

drawing of this little girl scrubbing this poor little helpless dog, and feel the emotion. Story is everything. A composer really depends on the story to get his inspiration.

"The story of *Snoopy, Come Home* had so much heart. It's not a child's story. It's a very serious story about loyalties and allegiances, and what it means to be torn by caring about two people," Sherman adds. "You write for characters, you write for situations, you write for feelings. I don't care if they're little drawings. They're people to me. If it's a little sketch of a dog, he's a person. He has feelings. He has a heart. There's absolutely no difference between writing for Julie Andrews and writing for Snoopy. None whatsoever."

Although it failed to match the box office success of *A Boy Named Charlie Brown*, *Snoopy, Come Home* is generally considered the best of the *Peanuts* features. In the *New York Times*, Howard Thompson wrote, "This sprightly, clever, and hilarious treat—all that a comic strip should be on the screen—is even better than *A Boy Named Charlie Brown*, which began the series."

Jeff Pidgeon comments, "*Snoopy, Come Home* deals with loss. You're not really sure what's going to happen to Lila. Is she going to be okay? They deal with it very directly in the film, when Charlie Brown asks, 'Why do people leave? Why do people always leave?' I found that very, very powerful as a kid. It's great that those stories confronted big things.

They're big through your entire life. It's not, 'Well, a kid moved away when I was little, and now I'm an adult.' No—you deal with loss your entire life, and it's always an issue."

More than twenty years after *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, Dave Brubeck created the score for the NASA Space Station episode of the most ambitious of all the animated *Peanuts* projects: the eight-part miniseries about U.S. history, *This Is America, Charlie Brown*, which ran from October 21, 1988, to May 23, 1989. Linus, Lucy, Charlie Brown, Peppermint Patty, Marcie, Franklin, Snoopy, and Woodstock become onlookers and occasional participants in various historic events. They cross the Atlantic on the *Mayflower*, meet the Wright Brothers at Kitty Hawk, eavesdrop on the Constitutional Convention, and visit the Smithsonian Institute. Snoopy drives the Golden Spike that links the two branches of the Transcontinental Railroad in 1869.

This Is America also involved a lot of adult characters in speaking parts, something Schulz had never allowed. Mendelson adds, "A lot of people would have said, 'My characters shouldn't do that.' But he said to me, 'It would be good for children to have this history.' Finally he agreed that we could have adults, because it wasn't the comic strip anymore. It was history."

The eight programs featured jazz scores by an impressive lineup of musicians. George Winston's music for the episode

about the creation of the Constitution featured a harpsichord version of "Linus and Lucy." Wynton Marsalis set the Wright Brother's flights to a series of upbeat brass melodies, while Dave Benoit favored a piano-heavy score to go with the stories of inventors Thomas Edison, Henry Ford, and Alexander Graham Bell.

"I worked from storyboard: Russell Gloyd, my producer, and I selected music from some of my previous recordings and played them as examples for Lee Mendelson," Brubeck recalls. "I remember sitting in the patio of Gloyd's home in Gilroy, California, going over the music with Lee and listening to his suggestions about what was needed. We recorded the music for the program in San Francisco. We did not play prearranged compositions but improvised on the chosen themes to fit the mood and action. Viewing the animation is helpful for a composer, or in my case an improviser, because it generates ideas. The special demands are in the timing: It's a challenge to fit musical ideas into a very specific time frame.

"I'm sure Vince Guaraldi's music was in our subconscious. How could it be otherwise?" he concludes. "His music has become such an integral part of the *Peanuts* shows that one hears those themes on seeing the characters. But I tried to make my own statement, even on tunes we used in the show that were composed by Vince."

The most famous piece Guaraldi composed was the upbeat "Linus and Lucy." The song followed Schulz for the rest of his life—which he seems to have enjoyed in spite of himself.

Mutts cartoonist Patrick McDonnell, who became friends with Schulz, recalls, "We went to a restaurant once where a woman was playing the piano, and Sparky had said that wherever he went, if there's a piano player, they immediately start playing 'Linus and Lucy.' We walked into the restaurant, and the woman continued playing whatever song she was playing. Sparky went over to her and said, 'Can you play "Linus and Lucy"?' She said, 'Well, I'm in the middle of this song.' He said, 'Segue.'"

Preserving Schulz's Vision

We felt an obligation to Lee: My dad was so loyal to all the people he worked with, and it wasn't fair to pull the rug out from under him. So the restriction was, we wanted everything to come from the comic strip.

Craig Schulz

After surgery for what proved to be colon cancer and some attendant medical problems, Schulz announced his retirement to more than 300 million readers on December 14, 1999. He died in his sleep during the night of February 12, 2000—hours before his final comic strip ran. Since the announcement of his retirement, there had been a worldwide outpouring of sorrow and regret, reminiscent of when Walt Disney died in 1966. Since Disney, no single individual had created so many beloved characters or transformed a popular art form so profoundly, nor had so many people felt they shared a personal bond with one artist.

Snoopy's Reunion, 1991
Dean Spille
Graphite, watercolor

Schulz had ensured many years earlier that no one else would ever draw the *Peanuts* comic strip, although papers around the world would continue to reprint old strips. But whether animated *Peanuts* productions would continue was a question Schulz's family would have to decide.

"We originally thought that if the voice wasn't coming from my dad then it shouldn't be done," says Craig Schulz. "After the shock of his passing, we realized that animation is really our first foot forward. Without animation, everything else suffers. You can only have a property last so long when you're dealing with toys and T-shirts and so forth, or there's no essence to it. Out of the fifty old shows, people are only seeing two or three a year. That was tough."

At the time of Schulz's death, Melendez was completing *It's the Pied Piper, Charlie Brown* (2000). He said, "It's a strange story, a takeoff where Snoopy becomes the Pied Piper of Hamelin. But it all takes place in Santa Rosa and the kids are the protagonists. For the first time we have a lot of adults; Sparky's never allowed that, but he did this time. I wish there'd been more of the *Peanuts* characters, and not so many adults. But if this works, it opens up our vistas tremendously."

It's the Pied Piper was an odd show that had little to do with the earlier *Peanuts* specials. When the town is overrun by "sports mice" (who dance as much as they play games), Charlie Brown and Linus negotiate an agreement for Snoopy to get rid of the rodents in return for a year's supply of dog food.

As Melendez noted, there are a lot of adults on screen, but they don't feel like they belong in the world of a concertina-playing beagle. In 1997, Schulz had said, "Now, we can go any direction with Snoopy. Woodstock, too. It's absurd to think of this dog and this bird wandering through the woods going on hikes and camping out. So as soon as an adult is in the strip, bang, the whole thing collapses. Because the adults bring everything back to reality. And it just spoils it."

Mendelson explains, "ABC, although they were happy to get the library, really wanted to do more shows if we could.

I said to the family, "'Why don't we just do what we did on Saturday morning? We won't do original stories. We'll take it all from the comic strips.' And that's what we did. The shows we did for them were literally comic strips pasted together. But it was difficult. It was not as much fun. It wasn't original stuff anymore. But at least we kept it going for a while."
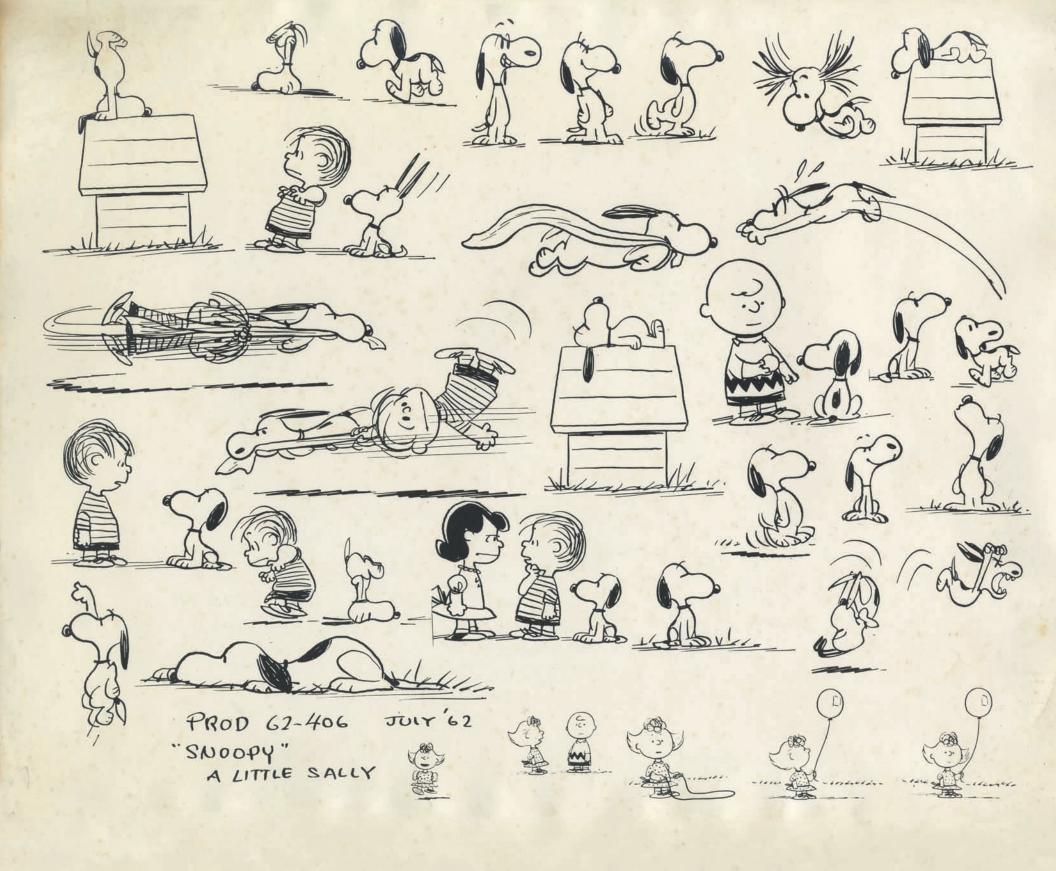
A Charlie Brown Valentine (2002), *I Want a Dog for Christmas, Charlie Brown* (2003), *Lucy Must be Traded, Charlie Brown* (2003), and *He's a Bully, Charlie Brown* (2006) were made using the cut-and-paste method Mendelson described. Jason Mendelson, who had graduated from voice work—and from Stanford—helped with the writing.

"We would try to find ways to put together coherent stories," he explains. "Luckily, Schulz would have ideas that lasted for weeks. So if you had a continuous string, it might be the foundation for a plot. We would pull from other years to supplement and complement that material. We'd add ideas from all over the place to create the new shows. But every time we did it, it was 100 percent from Schulz."

I Want a Dog for Christmas, Charlie Brown, 2003
Dean Spille
Graphite, watercolor

PROD 62-406
JULY 1962
MOSTLY LINUS

PROD 62-406   JULY '62
"SNOOPY"
A LITTLE SALLY

"The challenge was to make those pieces fit together," he continues. "The characters evolved over fifty years, but the spark of what they're trying to say and do was always the same. So a lot of it was literally cutting up the strips, pasting them into the storyboard, and trying it different ways. There are probably earlier shows that are better shows, because they were written for television, but I was proud of those shows because we made them directly from the strips, and we never deviated from that."

These specials also reused Guaraldi's music. Dave Benoit adds, "When Sparky wanted new music, I wrote new stuff. But once he passed away, the feeling was, let's go back to the original. So I rearranged a lot of Guaraldi's music to fit the scenes."

The animation was done in Korea and was noticeably inferior to the work of the Melendez Studio: Even the characters' signature walks looked different. "Everyone started sending work overseas," says Mendelson. "It didn't seem to affect the final outcome. If they can do it as well as we can do it for a lot less money, fine. If it didn't look good, Sparky would never have allowed it. If we had gone to him and said, 'We can't afford to do it here anymore,' and we couldn't do it well overseas, he would have just said, 'Let's not do anymore.'"

Although *He's a Bully, Charlie Brown* was the last special Mendelson and Melendez worked on, they and Schulz had started thinking about it almost ten years earlier. The story centered on Joe Agate, a character Schulz had introduced in the strip in April 1995. He was a bigger kid who cheated Rerun out of all his marbles until "Cool Thumb" Brown won them back, then walked off into the sunset in a spoof of the 1953 Western *Shane*.

In a lengthy interview with Fantagraphics founder Gary Groth in 1997, Schulz said, "I despise bullies, and I just hated them when I was a kid, and still do. Now, I don't draw them much in the strip, because they're hard to draw and it's hard to get any humor out of it. If I was drawing a more serious strip, I think I would bring them in, but I've tried to touch on it a couple of times, but it just doesn't work. I do want

Previous spread:
Reference images from *Peanuts* strip
Charles M. Schulz
Graphite and Ink

He's a Bully, Charlie Brown, 2006
Production cel signed by Bill Melendez

to do an animated show, and I know we're going to do it, eventually, about Charlie Brown challenging this kid who is stealing everybody's marbles, because he's a better player. And Charlie Brown ends up like Shane: He's the gunman who beats the kid."

Three years later, Melendez said, "I've got a real good idea that's in my mind, and Sparky's too. He came to me one time and said, 'I'd like to do a story about marbles. Did you ever play marbles?' 'Of course I played marbles.' This tough little kid comes around, and takes all the kids' marbles. So Charlie Brown brings out his sack of marbles and wins every marble back from him. Then he passes the marbles over to his friends who lost them, picks up his little bag, and goes off into the sunset. I don't know if we can use 'Shane,' but they can say, 'Charlie! Come back!'"

Much of the comedy in the finished program came from Snoopy's fussing as he trains Charlie Brown to shoot marbles—a performance similar to his crabby skating coach in *She's a Good Skate, Charlie Brown* (1980). Thirteen-year-old Taylor Lautner, the future star of the *Twilight* films, provided the voice of Joe Agate.

Two years after *He's a Bully* aired, Bill Melendez died, leaving Lee Mendelson as the only surviving member of the original trio. There was no new animation of the *Peanuts* characters for the next three years.

In 2011, *Happiness Is a Warm Blanket, Charlie Brown* debuted, a 45-minute direct-to-video special that later aired on Fox. The film was cowritten by Craig Schulz and *Pearls Before Swine* creator Stephan Pastis, who based it on two series of strips about Lucy trying to break Linus of his blanket habit. In the *Peanuts* comic strip in January 1961, she buried it; she made the blanket into a kite that blew out to sea in June 1962.

"Stephan, who'd worked at the studio and been on the board at the [Schulz] Museum, and I got together and said, 'Let's try one and see what we can come up with,'" says Craig. "Stephan and I spent almost a year going through comic strips. We tried to make it flow smoothly using a different technique than Lee's. Lee was stringing comics together, strip by strip by strip; we were pulling individual panels and transferring voices from one character to another.

"The project took almost three years to build because we had new people in every single phase," he continues. "Neither Stephan nor I had written a special, but I think both of us knew what the boundaries of *Peanuts* were, which is important. We had a new animation team at WildBrain, we had new music from Mark Mothersbaugh. Everybody was brand new on that project, and everybody had a learning curve."

Andy Beall, who had worked as an animator on many of the Pixar features, including *Up*, codirected the show. "We based our model sheets on the comic strip," he explains. "But in looking at the early animated specials, we realized Melendez had simplified the shapes. He made them more animate-able than the comic strip versions were. They're similar shapes, but they're shapes I can move around in a way that I probably wouldn't be able to if I stuck strictly with the comic strip version."

The classic *Peanuts* specials were done using traditional animation techniques. By the time *Warm Blanket* was in production, the technology had advanced considerably. Computer coloring had replaced hand-inked cels; backgrounds could be painted digitally instead of with watercolors.

"Technology has changed so much that even if we tried to make it look exactly the same, it wouldn't. We're in a high-definition world now," Beall continues. "We even added film grain to the special, because it looked too crisp. A really cool thing about those early specials is they feel handmade. Part of that probably comes from the fact that they had no time and no money. But it adds to the simplicity and [gives] an innocence to those specials, which perfectly matches Linus standing on a stage and giving the speech about Christmas."

As production on *Warm Blanket* progressed, the young artists discovered what Melendez and his crew had learned decades earlier: The deceptive simplicity of Schulz's drawings made them very difficult to animate. Codirector Frank Molieri comments, "Schulz's designs are really hard. You think they're cartoony, but they're not. You can be expressive, but you can't do squash, you can't do stretch, and you cannot overanimate them. The way they're constructed limits the amount of movement you can do.

"Andy and I both wanted to emulate the [ones from the] '60s. We both admire what Bill Melendez did," he continues. "The choices they made on some of those specials were just brilliant. Everything was properly set up, beautifully art-directed and beautifully staged."

Some of the animation was done in the United States: Beall and Molieri are quick to praise their artists, including Darlie Brewster, Wendy Perdue, and Roberto Casale. But one reason the directors agreed to work on the project was to get the chance to animate the characters they had watched and loved for so many years.

"As an animator, I always knew simple is hard to do. But I had no idea how difficult it was going to be," Molieri adds. "You admire what Melendez and his artists did. You admire what Schulz did: 'I knew the guy was good, I didn't know he was *this* good.' You wonder why you're just realizing that: It's because now you're trying to do what they did. It's like being at the wheel and driving the car as opposed to sitting in the backseat. You learn a lot of respect."

Beall, who animated much of Snoopy in the show (and provided the new noises for him), confesses, "I love drawing Snoopy. It's not that you can't do certain things with the kids, but they're the straight men. They stand there and talk. Snoopy is an animator's dream. He's definitely the most malleable of the characters, which makes him so much fun."

Unlike Melendez during the '60s, Beall and Molieri had to send a lot of the animation overseas. Although sending work abroad has been standard practice in television animation for decades, it was a new experience for the directors.
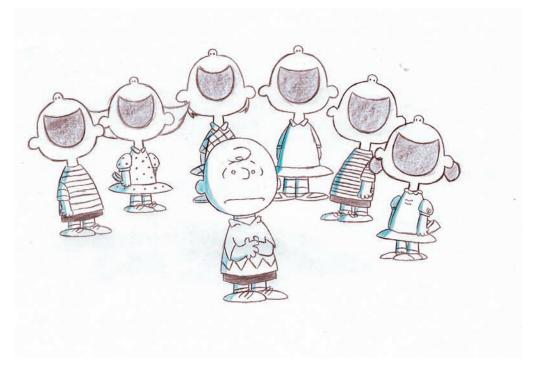
"I had to learn what I needed to do to get good work from the system," Beall explains. "The first batch of animation we got back wasn't quite what we wanted. Frank and I looked at each other and said, 'We've got to go to Korea.' It turned out to be the best thing that could have happened to the show. The Korean animators were trying to do the best they could, so it was nice to sit down and talk about the scenes with them. We would not have gotten the same level of quality if we hadn't gone there."

Mothersbaugh, who created the score for *Warm Blanket*, reflects, "Because it's animation, you're called on to do a lot of the things that film would normally do: make people's hearts beat, make grass rustle in the wind, make clouds move in the sky. Even when you're working with very detailed, hyper-realistic animation, there are so many things it can never copy that's done just by pointing a camera at something and letting it run for thirty seconds. So you get to add a lot of nuances to storytelling that you're not called upon to do in live action. I love it for that reason."

Jeannie Schulz comments, "Personally, I never felt that we had to use a linear comic-strip-by-comic-strip approach. I learned that from Sparky. I couldn't always tell what he did and didn't like in an animated scene, but he clearly recognized the difference between the comic strip and the animation. Andy recognizes that. He cares very sincerely about the characters and about the previous animation. They decided to go back because people like the animation from the '60s. But the characters changed over time. Sparky

never liked what he drew yesterday; he insisted Bill keep updating the characters. They changed their drawing to match his."

Although all the participants agree that future animation projects are possible, everyone expresses concern about preserving the integrity of Schulz's legacy. Craig Schulz sums up their feelings when he says, "I've found, from having people giving me their ideas about a *Peanuts* thing they want to do, that not many people know the boundaries of *Peanuts*, not even the language. It bothers me, but at some point I know I'm going to be gone, or someone's going to be gone, and it's going to go beyond those boundaries." He concludes, "I think it's sad for the family to see that happen, but the reality is, my dad's gone. It's been ten years, but the public still loves his work."

Spot art of Snoopy
Andrew Beall
Graphite

Happiness Is a Warm Blanket, Charlie Brown, 2011
Andrew Beall
Graphite

An Ongoing Influence

The Peanuts *specials were a major and very direct influence on my work. I don't know if sophistication is the proper word, but as a young kid I liked not being talked down to when I would watch a Charlie Brown special or a* Muppets *episode or a vignette on Sesame Street. There was an assumption, in a good way, that I would understand what was going on, that I would get it. I think that made a big impression on me, and on everybody I know from our generation. It influenced our taste tremendously.*

Andrew Stanton, director, *Finding Nemo*

When *It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown* aired in 2003, it became the most watched holiday special of the decade, with 13.2 million viewers, beating out *Boo to You Too! Winnie the Pooh* (2001, 11.3 million) and *Scared Shrekless* (2010, 9.8 million). In addition to retaining their popularity, the classic *Peanuts* specials remain favorites among the animation artists who created the most successful and critically acclaimed features and television series of recent decades.

"I find inspiration in the strip, I find inspiration in the features, I find inspiration in the television specials," states Jeff Pidgeon. "If you compare what Schulz did in *Peanuts* with what Pixar does, I feel like we're both accessible to children but also have a very adult level. It wouldn't necessarily be apparent to you as a child, but you could appreciate more and more levels of the strip and the specials as you grew up. Pixar strives to achieve the same thing. I don't like to do things just for one audience. I like to try to do things that can grow with you as you get older. You love it as a kid, and then as you get older you see more and more in it."

"What stands out when you see the specials is the timing, how well the jokes play," says *Phineas and Ferb* cocreator Dan Povenmire. "Because they were using actual children, sometimes the reads were halting or stilted in a very charming way. Melendez made the absolute best out of that. Directing is all about finding how long that pause needs to be, how long this movement needs to take in order

to be the funniest. He used all the long, uncomfortable silences between lines. But they also did wonderful physical animation, like Snoopy wrestling with the lawn chair in the Thanksgiving show."

Christopher Shea's reading of St. Luke in *A Charlie Brown Christmas* remains an iconic moment in television history. Animators hold it up as a model of blending the animated and vocal performances into a model of understated acting. "Christopher Shea's Bible reading in the Christmas special is still a showstopper, even if you're not religiously inclined," says Dave Pruiksma. "It really, really works. It has to do with the sincerity, because sincerity is such a big part of Linus's personality. Shea is just perfect as that character."

"Chris in *A Charlie Brown Christmas* is the gold standard. Everything I did didn't measure up," says Stephen Shea modestly. "It really made a big difference to him later on that he had done that. Not because of any recognition, but because he felt that it was important. His passing [in 2010] appeared on a website about people of [note] who'd passed away. My mom was very touched to see how many people wrote about him—people he had never met, who were moved by the character and the sweetness of the voice, who felt as if they knew him.

"I did what I did as a kid, and I didn't realize the importance of it—how many people would see it, how many would appreciate it," Shea continues. "I'm just fortunate to have been in that position, and feel grateful for it. Getting to work with Mr. Melendez and once with Charles Schulz was pretty awesome."

The use of children's voices has led other artists to choose child actors over adults for their films. "We had a discussion early on specifically about the *Peanuts* shows," says Jeff Marsh. "One of the reasons we wanted to find kids is that they give you a natural innocence that you will never achieve with an older actor. It's so easy for Phineas to come off as a smart-aleck, know-it-all jerk. The lines spoken by Vincent Martella as a kid made him sound wonderfully fun and innocent and joyous."

Schulz transformed the newspaper comic strip: instead of characters screaming or throwing things at each other, he drew them talking and thinking. While other cartoonists showed their characters yelling, sobbing, or roaring with laughter, Schulz's drawings expressed more nuanced emotions: ennui, disillusionment, worry. When these attitudes were translated into animation, they offered a model of expressive understatement. The acting moments proved that simple, stylized animation can communicate subtle and sincere emotions. The *Peanuts* specials offered an especially important lesson for young animators who still struggle with the need to use often limited resources creatively.

"The reason I wanted to animate the scene between the father and Nemo at the end of *Finding Nemo* so badly was because I wanted the type of scene that would succeed on a minimal level rather than a broad one," says Doug Sweetland. "The care I took in that scene definitely came from the feeling that too much would ruin it: Everything had to be felt, and everything had to be simple. It's the same philosophy that makes the most emotional moments in the Charlie Brown specials work."

"One thing every cartoonist mentions, but I have to say really helps on *The Simpsons*, is the level of minimalism that Schulz used to create a great variety of expressions—it's almost like a really long gray scale," explains David Silverman. "He didn't have five expressions; he could come up with fifty. The blank poker face was something I'd always do in *The Simpsons* and tell the other directors, 'You're better off giving Homer a blank look here.' It's funnier if he's moving less. Don't over-indicate, because you're going to undercut the feeling. The audience won't really know why it's not working, but they'll feel that you're sweating the joke. It won't seem as funny, because the characters wouldn't behave that way."

Snoopy spot art:
MetLife Commercial
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

Marsh adds, "They got so much out of the characters, just by giving them time to look and think. We really try to make sure we keep that in there: Schulz and Melendez taught us how to do that."

"We do a lot of bits in our show where we get more humor out of Phineas and Ferb *not* reacting to something big happening right next to them," agrees Povenmire. "That comes directly from *Peanuts* through *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* to us. If you want to trace its lineage, *Peanuts* was the first comic strip that did it, the first cartoon that did it. The humor came from someone *not* moving or reacting to something."

If the stylized animation of Linus and Snoopy influenced animators and directors, the stylized backgrounds, limited perspectives, and bold use of color in the specials provided inspiration for designers, painters, and art directors.

"In terms of art direction, the thing I would have to point to in the *Peanuts* specials is the simple clarity," says Ralph Eggleston. "Andrew Stanton always hammers me, 'I have thirty frames to sell a scene. I want to get back to the characters. I don't want some big show-off-y shot.' I learned from him how to make a simple, clear image that communicates an idea. Don't be fancy just for fancy's sake. Make it look good, but make the audience get it as quickly as possible. I think the *Peanuts* specials did that exceptionally well."

"The work in the *Peanuts* specials is more influential to me now, since I've been in animation for a while," adds Paul Felix reflectively. "I've always been drawn to the Disney-type illusion of realism. I appreciate the graphic decisions that were made in those shows more than I may have ten years ago. I really am astounded, especially by their use of color. The Halloween special in particular has really striking fuchsias against greens and ultramarines. And the handcrafted quality of the wet-on-wet watercolor skies in the nighttime sequences. Looking back, that's exactly what Halloween feels like to me, and it's probably because of that special. I expect nights to be that dark and purply when I go

out. I can almost sense the temperature. I think that's the power of the color stylization in that show."

The imagery of the *Peanuts* shows influenced young visual artists; the scores affected young musicians. "One of the things that did interest me from early on was the Vince Guaraldi music: It struck me how different *Peanuts* cartoons were from a sound point of view," says Mark Mothersbaugh. "At different times, I've played and written music that was influenced by Vince Guaraldi."

Dave Benoit adds, "I was about eleven years old when the first Christmas special aired, and it made a big impression on me. I was just getting interested in jazz piano, and when that came out, I thought, 'Oh boy, this is how I want to play!' Guaraldi's style of playing stayed with me. Like him, I was not a trained classical pianist. I'd had piano lessons, but most of my playing was by ear, playing jazz. It was the foundation of how I developed my style."

Not surprising, other animated TV series have offered homages and spoofs of the *Peanuts* specials. "Treehouse of Horror XIX" on *The Simpsons* included "It's the Grand Pumpkin, Milhouse," an affectionate send-up with Lisa and Milhouse as Sally and Linus. Silverman says, "'Grand Pumpkin' was really fun. We decided to redesign the characters so that they had '*Peanuts*' proportions. The bodies were smaller compared to their heads, and they had the '*Peanuts*' feet. My favorite gag is that they hear Marge off-screen—*whaa whaaaamp wha whaa whaaamp*—you widen out, she's practicing the trombone. We watched a lot of *Peanuts* specials to get that animation style down, including the walk cycle."

Under the credits of the special *Phineas and Ferb: A Very Perry Christmas*, there's a shot of the cast frolicking onstage that mirrors the characters dancing to Schroeder's and Snoopy's music in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*.

"We wrote to the heads of the channel about wanting to make that special longer," says Povenmire. "We felt we couldn't tell the story in twenty-two minutes and get the amount of heart we wanted into it. We talked about *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, and said, 'Yes, this is an episode that is only going to play at Christmastime. But it could become the kind of thing a new generation of kids looks at and says, 'It's Christmastime. They're playing the *Phineas and Ferb* Christmas special.' We appealed to their fond memories of *Charlie Brown* to get them to give us the extra eleven minutes to tell the story the way we wanted to. So we felt it was only fitting to give a little nod to Schulz in the show."
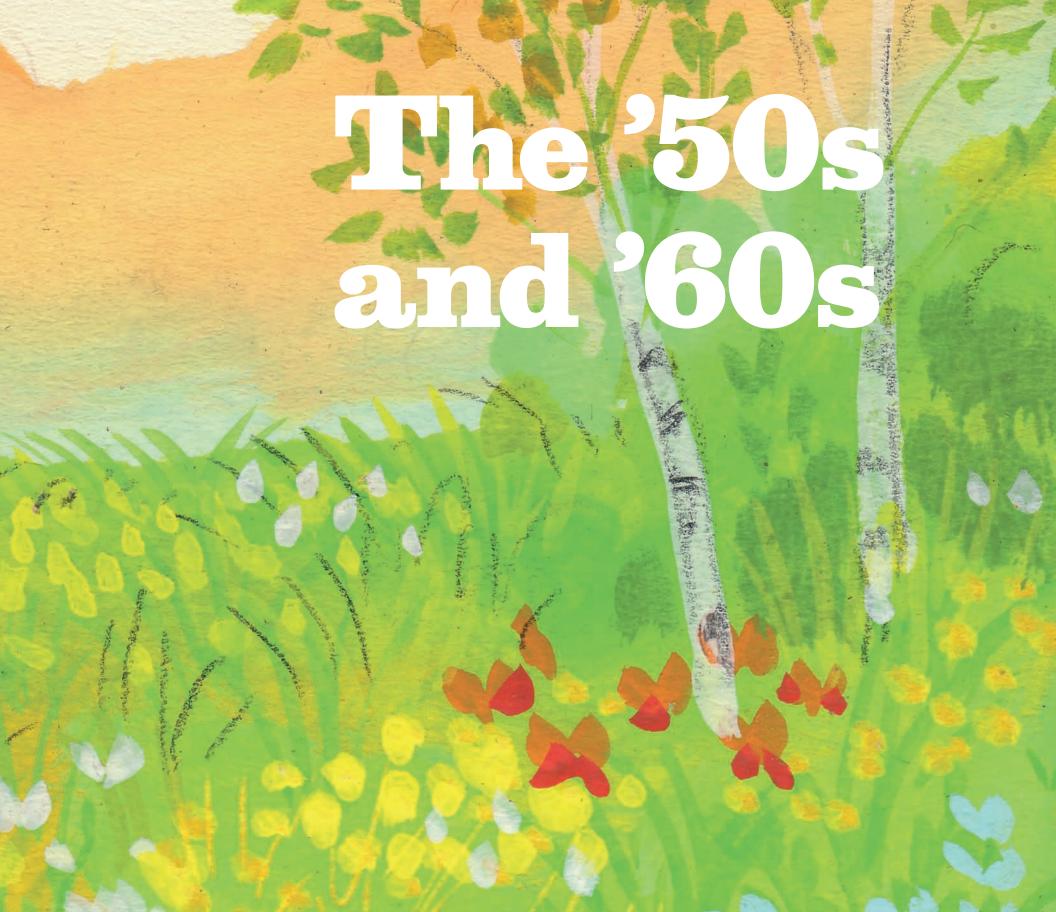
Half a century after its debut, *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, the special the creators feared was a flop, continues to influence the art of animation. Sweetland says, "It doesn't surprise me that I confuse *A Charlie Brown Christmas* with *It's a Wonderful Life*, because to me they have essentially the same amount of emotional payoff. And *A Charlie Brown Christmas* does it in a half hour. By the time those kids are singing around that tree, I'm leveled every time. If I were trying to achieve a certain kind of emotion, it would be a perfect example of what I'd strive for."

Schulz, who could be extremely self-deprecating, often described himself as a man who spends his time drawing funny pictures. But he also said, "I get very annoyed with reviewers who say our shows are cloying or too sweet. They really aren't, unless you just love raunchiness. I think there's a market for things that are decent and funny, so you don't have to sit there wondering when they're going to start swearing again. What's wrong with doing things that are nice?"

Charlie Brown Model sheet pose, 2011
Bob Scott
Red pencil

49

A Boy Named Charlie Brown, 1969
Dean Spille
Graphite, gouache

The '50s and '60s

The first animation of the *Peanuts* characters was done in the late '50s: the credits for *The Tennessee Ernie Ford Show* and the Ford Falcon commercials. The title sequence had extremely minimal movements—the characters did little more than announce the program. Their voices sounded like preschool children, younger than most of them would have been in the strip. The Ford commercials featured slightly older voices and fuller animation.

Dave Pruiksma, who animated the Sultan in *Aladdin*, says, "Animation is a pragmatic medium. A good animator, a good director finds ways to make designs work that aren't created to be animated. They came up with the exact way the characters would walk if they were really moving, the way they would phrase their dialogue—even in the Ford commercials. Right from the start, they captured the feel of the strip perfectly."

When *A Charlie Brown Christmas* premiered in 1965, it made a profound impression on viewers, especially young artists. *Mutts* creator Patrick McDonnell recalls, "Charles Schulz is the reason I became a cartoonist. I was wholly immersed in *Peanuts*. When I heard there was going to be a Charlie Brown Christmas special, that was the best Christmas gift that year. His strip was magical, and as a kid, I thought the animation really captured all the magic. I think I've watched it every Christmas of my life since."
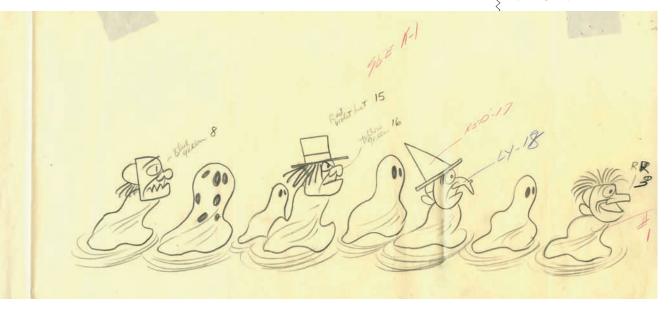
Schulz later commented, "Both Bill Melendez and I have a hard time watching it over the many Christmas seasons it reappears, for it seems full of inconsistences—like the continuity error that marred the scenes that contain Charlie Brown's wooden Christmas tree. Sharp-eyed viewers will notice that the tree grows several branches between the tree lot."

The number of branches on the tree does shift from scene to scene. Artists who worked on other well-loved animated films, including *The Iron Giant* and *The Lion King*, also complain about technical flaws. But the errors don't matter because the audience is too involved with the characters and the story to care about an odd tree branch (if they even notice it).

Craig Schulz says, "My favorite's always been *The Great Pumpkin*. *Christmas* was done so quickly, the characters weren't necessarily drawn perfectly. That's one of the things I think is so loveable about that show. But by *Pumpkin*, they had really improved the animation. I like the story line, and you got your first taste of Snoopy chasing the Red Baron. All in all, *Pumpkin* was a really solid, great show."

It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, 1966
Artist unknown
Graphite

"The *Peanuts* specials are one of the reasons I wanted to go into animation, particularly *It's the Great Pumpkin*," adds animator Andy Beall. "Even as a kid, I recognized that it perfectly captured what it felt like to go out trick-or-treating on Halloween. You can feel the crisp, cool air in the artwork."
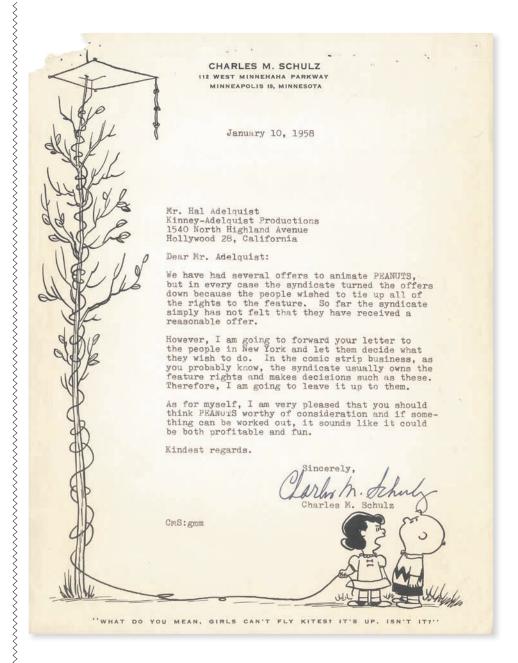
Up director Pete Docter says, "There's a bit in *The Great Pumpkin* where Snoopy marches along as Schroeder plays 'It's a Long Way to Tipperary,' but when he switches to 'My Buddy,' Snoopy starts howling, because he's so overcome by the emotion of the music. It's just a long, held camera shot. There's no fancy filmmaking; it's just acting. Some of the drawings—I pause through them now—look a little bit lumpy and off-model, but they're beautifully expressive."

The adventures of the other characters play in counterpoint to Snoopy's antics, including Charlie Brown's unsuccessful efforts at trick-or-treating: "I got a rock."

Wall-E director Andrew Stanton adds, "We were looking at a shot earlier today, and somebody asked whether those were bushes in the background. I said 'No, those are rocks.' One artist replied, 'I got a rock.'"

You're in Love, Charlie Brown (1967) introduced the famous motif of the sound of a trombone signifying an off-camera adult. "As there were no adults in the strip, Sparky said, 'How are you going to handle the teacher?'" says Mendelson. "I asked Vince Guaraldi if there were some instrument that could sound like talking; he got the trombone out, which worked very effectively."
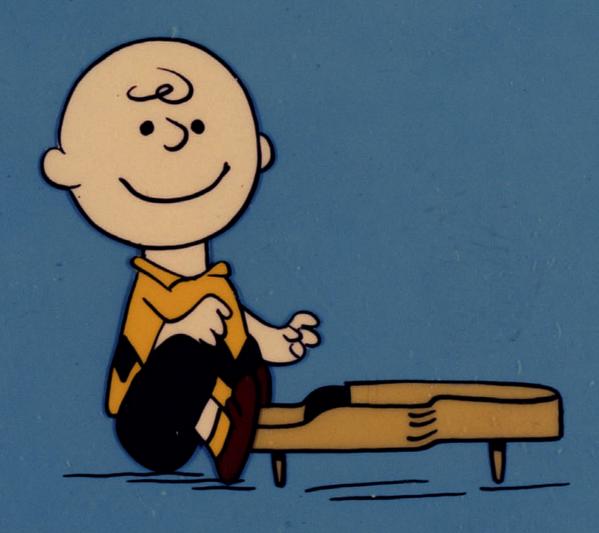
It Was a Short Summer, Charlie Brown (1969) includes one of the best pieces of animation in any of the specials: the epic wrist-wrestling battle between Lucy and Snoopy as "The Masked Marvel." Eric Goldberg, who directed the "Rhapsody in Blue" segment of *Fantasia 2000*, says, "Bill Littlejohn animated the amazing wrestling match between Lucy and Snoopy. It was based on the comic strips, but by the time it got animated, you saw the beads of sweat forming on the characters' foreheads and the tension in their arms. In an interview aired in *Happy Birthday, Charlie Brown* (1979), Schulz reported that he felt it was "the best animated scene of all the shows we have done."

Charles Schulz politely sidesteps an inquiry about animating his characters in this letter from 1958.

"I'm sure Bill loved those characters as much as Sparky did." JEANNIE SCHULZ
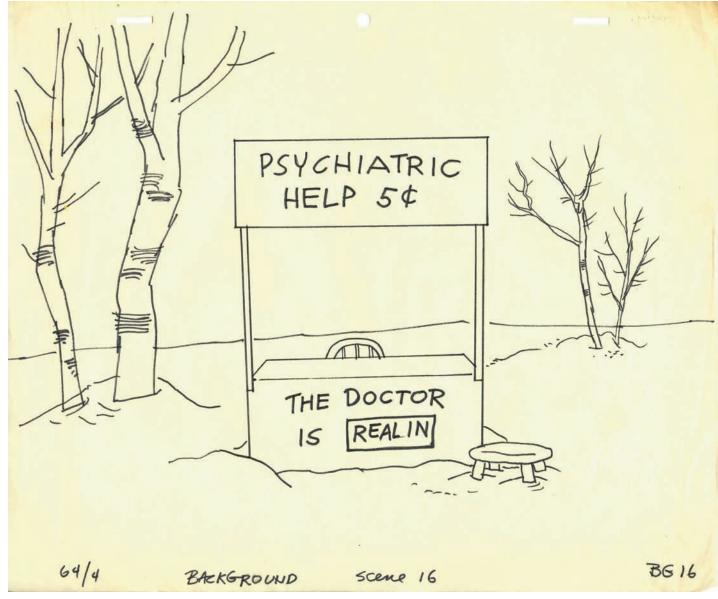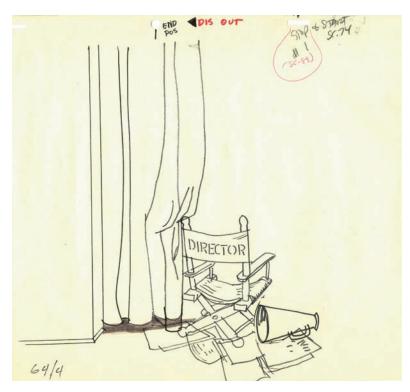
A Charlie Brown Christmas, 1965

Depressed and puzzled by holiday celebrations that seem to exalt greed and selfishness, Charlie Brown learns the true meaning of Christmas when Linus recites the Gospel of St. Luke. This classic program set the pattern for the animation of *Peanuts* and established the half-hour animated holiday special. It became an Emmy and Peabody winner.

A Charlie Brown Christmas, 1965
Artist unknown
Pen

> "A field of Christmas trees sounds like a design nightmare if you're trying to get the viewer's eye to look where it's supposed to, but the minimalism with which they handled it is a real lesson to me."

PAUL FELIX, ART DIRECTOR

A Charlie Brown Christmas, 1965
Artist unknown
Pen

Above
A Charlie Brown Christmas, 1965
Bill Melendez
Pen
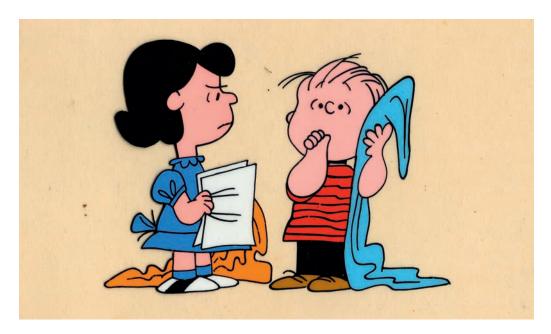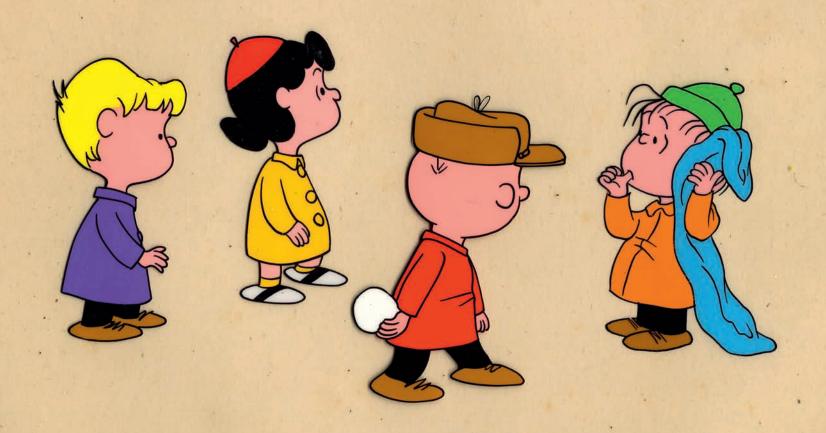
A Charlie Brown Christmas, 1965
Artists unknown
Graphite

Top:
A Charlie Brown Christmas, 1965
Production cel
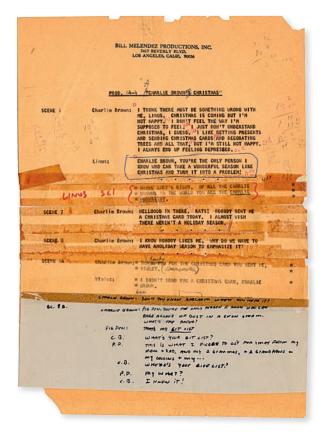
"In *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, when the kids are trying to hit the can with snowballs, Charlie Brown picks up a snowball and he leans back like a pitcher. It's just a small, subtle thing, but it was a nice little character moment."
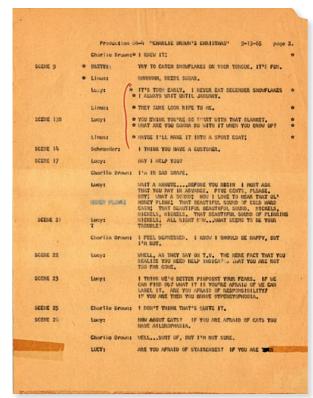
DAVID SILVERMAN, DIRECTOR
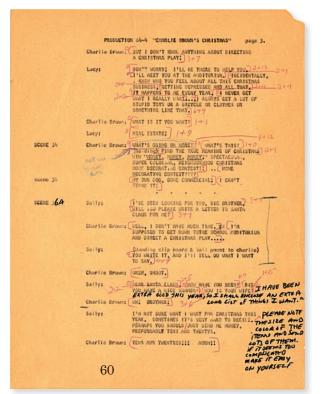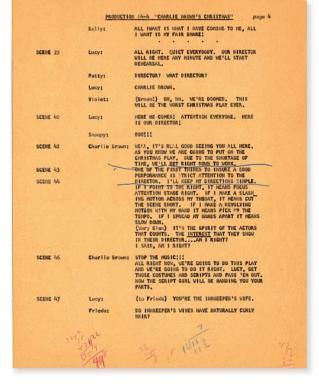
A Charlie Brown Christmas, 1965
Production cel
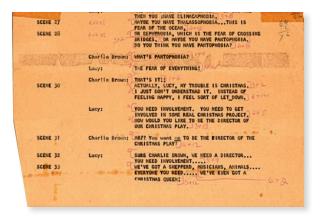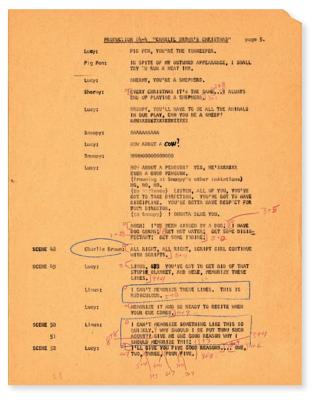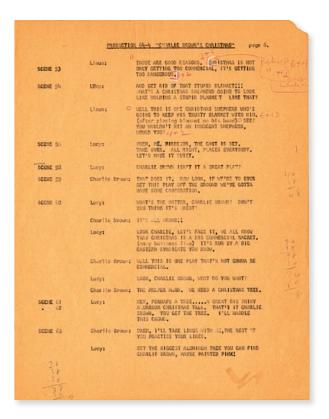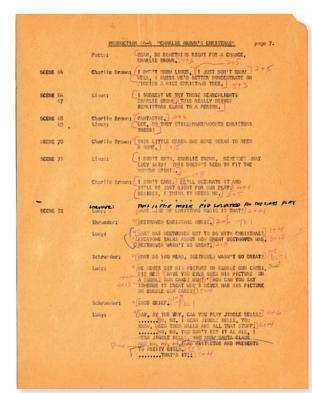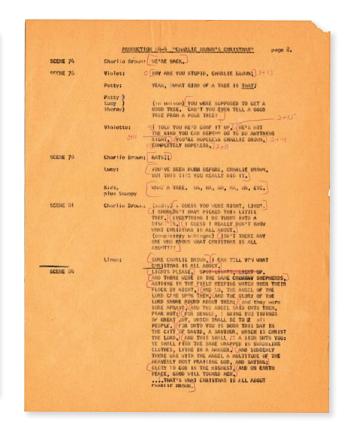
Script pages for *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, 1965

"You can watch one-hundred-million-dollar movies that espouse the virtues of humility and simplicity, but in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, you have something that actually is simple. Everything about the production of the cartoon espouses the virtues of the cartoon. That's an incredibly rare thing."

DOUG SWEETLAND, ANIMATOR

Charlie Brown's All-Stars, 1966

A local store owner offers to provide uniforms for Charlie Brown's baseball team. But there's a condition: To get the uniforms he's always wanted, he has to get rid of the girls and Snoopy. Although it's one of the lesser-known specials, *All-Stars* has a loyal following.

Bill Melendez

Here's the suggested promo copy we discussed. It should run as close to 55 seconds as possible; it could run over and we'll edit out a sentence or two, but it has to run at least 50 seconds. Please -- if he's uncomfortable with a word or phrase, don't hesitate to change in any way. Obviously, it should be done in the Charlie Brown voice, with the proper inflections and phrasings.

Thanks very much for your help.

Steve Libby 1/22/66

== ⸗ ⸗ == ⸗ ==

CHARLIE BROWN: HI, I'M CHARLIE BROWN. AND, GOOD GRIEF, IT HAS BEEN A LONG TIME SINCE WE LAST VISITED WITH YOU ON TELEVISION... ALMOST SIX MONTHS SINCE "A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS" -- REMEMBER? WELL, I HAVE SOME GOOD NEWS FOR YOU. IF YOU FOLLOW US IN THE COMIC STRIPS EVERY DAY, YOU KNOW WE ALL LOVE BASEBALL. SNOOPY AND LUCY AND LINUS AND ME, WE HAVE A TEAM. IT ISN'T A VERY GOOD TEAM, BUT WE HAVE A LOT OF FUN. WELL, WE'RE ALL COMING BACK TO TELEVISION FOR ANOTHER VISIT, WITH A BASEBALL SHOW. I'M THE MANAGER AND PITCHER, AND SCHROEDER IS THE CATCHER, AND WAIT TILL YOU SEE SNOOPY STEAL THOSE BASES! WHO WINS THE BALL GAME? I WON'T TELL YOU THAT BECAUSE IT WOULDN'T BE FAIR, AND YOU KNOW THAT CHARLIE BROWN ALWAYS BELIEVES IN FAIR PLAY. BUT WE'LL TAKE YOU OUT TO THE OLD BALL GAME ON CBS-TELEVISION WEDNESDAY EVENING, JUNE 8. HOPE YOU'LL BE IN THE STANDS ROOTING FOR US -- 'CAUSE WE'VE JUST GOT TO WIN THIS GAME. IT'S AN EXCITING GAME, ALL RIGHT, EVEN THOUGH LUCY DOES CALL ME A BLOCKHEAD AND EVEN THOUGH ... (SIGHS) ... WELL, I DO HAVE MY PROBLEMS. JOIN US, PLEASE, RIGHT HERE ON THIS STATION, IN COLOR. ON WEDNESDAY EVENING, JUNE 8. SURE AS MY NAME IS CHARLIE BROWN, YOU'LL HAVE FUN ... AND SO WILL WE, JUST KNOWING YOU'RE CHEERING FOR US. SEE YOU WEDNESDAY NIGHT.

© United Feature Syndicate, Inc. 1966

IN COLOR – CBS-TV – 8:30 P.M. NYT
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 8

MEMO TO STATION PROMOTION MANAGERS

It is our hope that the enclosed -- supplementing Alex Kennedy's promotion kit on "Charlie Brown's All-Stars" -- will be helpful in meeting your promotional goals on this June 8 in-color CBS-TV program.

You'll find:

1) A color on-air slide, with your station's call letters, channel number, city and state personalized to your own operation;

2) A 7 1/2 IPS, 57-second audio track promoting the show. The voice is that of the child who plays "Charlie Brown" on air.

3) A transcript of this promotion copy.

4) A brief feature for your local press placement. (You'll possibly want to up-date this story, depending on the outcome of the Emmy awards May 22; "A Charlie Brown Christmas" has been nominated.)

5) A credit list for "Charlie Brown's All-Stars".

I've been fortunate enough to see roughly half of the "All-Stars" show on the Moviola, and would like to go on record as saying it's an even finer show than "A Charlie Brown Christmas" -- and you know how great that one was.

Be sure to tell your local sports editor about the show ... he may want to plug it on-air. It's entirely baseball, excepting for a very brief sequence in midshow; and he'll doubtless appreciate your advising him about this TV event.

Thanks for your help, and best regards.
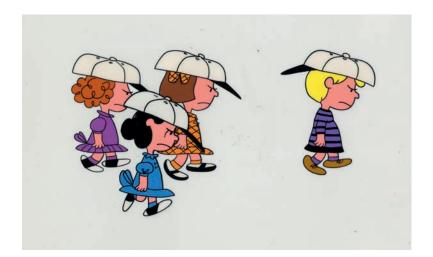
Steve Libby

BROUGHT TO YOU BY YOUR LOCAL COCA-COLA BOTTLER
Publicity Contact: Steve Libby • Thomas J. Deegan Company, Inc.
Time & Life Building • New York 10020 • PLaza 7-7070

Charlie Brown's All-Stars, 1966
A script for a promotional spot and a letter to TV stations carrying the special.
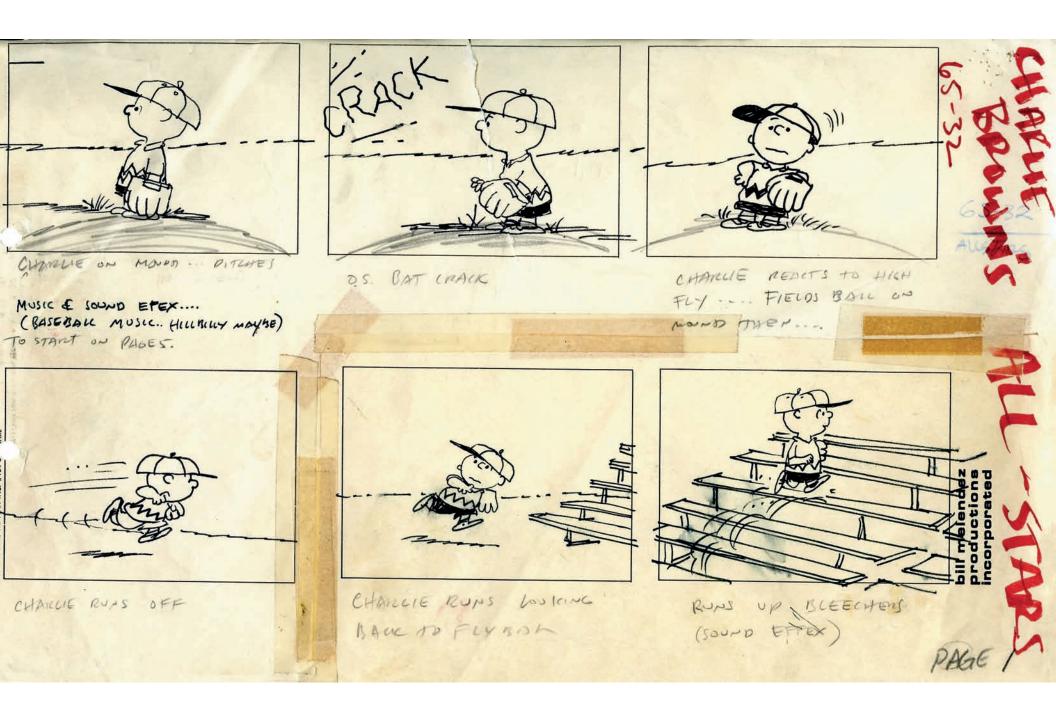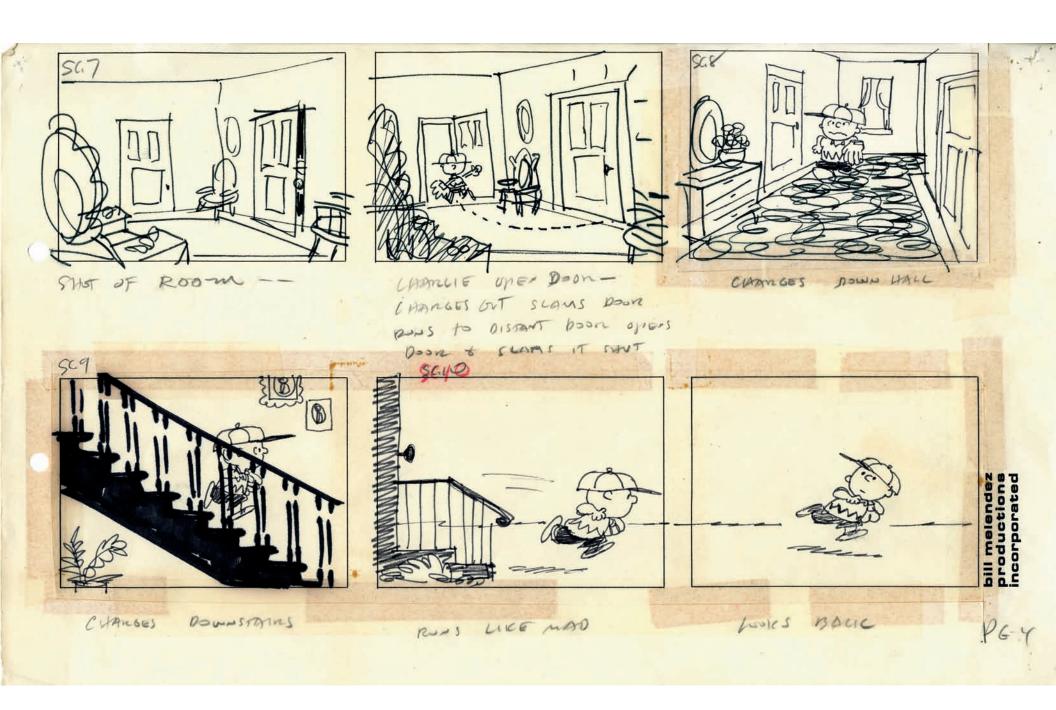
Charlie Brown's All-Stars, 1966
Production cels and a script page

Scene Two (Linus and C.Brown sitting on curb)

C.Brown: I don't know what to do Linus. I guess maybe
          I ought to resign as manager.

XXXXXXX (Snoopy races in with pen and paper for him
          to resign on)

          Even my own dog wants me to resign.

Linus: I'll go put up a new notice for manager in
          Mr.Hennesy's grocery store. (exits)

C.Brown (very upset,excited) : XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX What's
the rushXXXXXXXXXXX After nine hundred and ninety
          nine games, don't I desrve one more chance??

          (Snoopy shoves XXX pen at him, urging him
          to resign)

          All rig t. All right. (He starts to write)

          "Fellow team-mates,".....(but as Charlie writes
          we see that his pen leaks all over the paper..."

(disgusted) I can't even quit XIXXX properly....

Linus: (rushing back,excited)

          Charlie Borwn! Charlie Brown! Guess whst.
          (He tumbles all over his blanket in the
          excitement)

C.Brown: What Linus? What happened?

Linus: Mr.Hennessy saw me putting up the notice and
          he started asking about the team and guess what?

C.Brown: WHAT!

Linus: He's going to give us uniforms. Honest to
          goodness real baseball unfiorms. With a name
          and everything.

C Brown: That's gr aat. Oh wait till the team hears
          about this. This is just the inspiration we
          needed Linus. Now nothing will stop us...

Linus: (as they rush off) Now maybe we'll win one in
          a row.... (Snoopy meanwhile has gotten quite
          excited and is jumping all around,climaxed
          by grabbing of Linus blanket and sending him
          into orbit.....)

③

CHARLIE ON MOUND ... PITCHES

MUSIC & SOUND EFEX ....
(BASEBALL MUSIC.. HILLBILLY MAYBE)
TO START ON PAGES.

O.S. BAT CRACK

CHARLIE REACTS TO HIGH
FLY .... FIELDS BALL ON
MOUND THEN ....

CHARLIE RUNS OFF

CHARLIE RUNS LOOKING
BACK TO FLY BALL

RUNS UP BLEECHERS
(SOUND EFFEX)

PAGE 1

65-32
CHARLIE BROWN'S
ALL-STARS

bill melendez
productions
incorporated

SC.7

SC.8

SHOT OF ROOM —

CHARLIE OPES DOOR —
CHARGES OUT SLAMS DOOR
RUNS TO DISTANT DOOR OPENS
DOOR & SLAMS IT SHUT

CHANGES DOWN HALL

SC.9

SC.10

CHARGES DOWNSTAIRS

RUNS LIKE MAD

LOOKS BACK

bill melendez
productions
incorporated

PG-4

Charlie Brown's All-Stars, 1966
Storyboards of Charlie Brown going long to catch a fly ball.
Artist unknown
Ink

It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, 1966

The arrival of Halloween finds Linus loyally waiting for the arrival of the Great Pumpkin—to the annoyance of Lucy. The program also introduced the animated version of Snoopy as the World War I Flying Ace in a memorable fantasy sequence. One of the most beloved of the Peanuts specials, _Great Pumpkin_ is ranked second only to _A Charlie Brown Christmas_.

It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, 1966
Production cel

LUCY: "AUGH!...

LUCY: "... MY LIPS TOUCHED DOG LIPS!!"

St. 109

PG-42
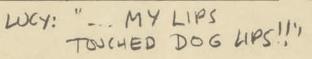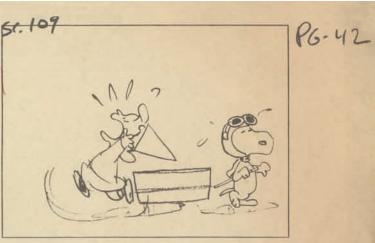
LUCY RUNS WILDLY IN CIRCLE SCREAMIN AS DOG LEAPS OUT AND INTO SNOOTY POSE
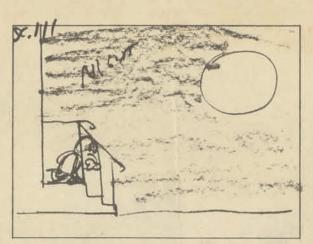
LUCY: "BLEAH... AUGH... POISONED... DOG LIPS... BLEAH.. AUGH!!!"

BACKGROUND   SCENE 105

PG-43

SNOOPY TEARFULLY AND SOBBING, DRAMATICALLY EXITS — SCHROEDER CONTINUOS PLAYING SAD SONG
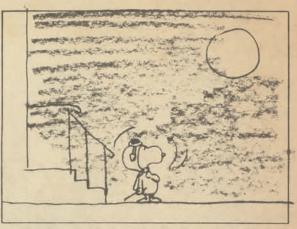
SOBBING SNOOPY OUT INTO THE NIGHT.... Put MOON ON cel + Use FOR SC. 130 TOO

SNOOPY USES SCARF TO WIPE AWAY TEARS.. THEN COMPOSES SELF BEFORE WHAT LIES AHEAD.

It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, 1966
Above:
Storyboards
Artist unknown
Graphite, grease pencil

Left:
A layout drawing of Snoopy's imaginary
no-man's land.
Artist unknown
Graphite

Right:
Production cel

69

> "When we first got to CalArts, Andrew Stanton and some other students and I would get together at Halloween and Christmas and watch the specials. We all knew them by heart."

RALPH EGGLESTON, PIXAR ART DIRECTOR

It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, 1966
Production cels
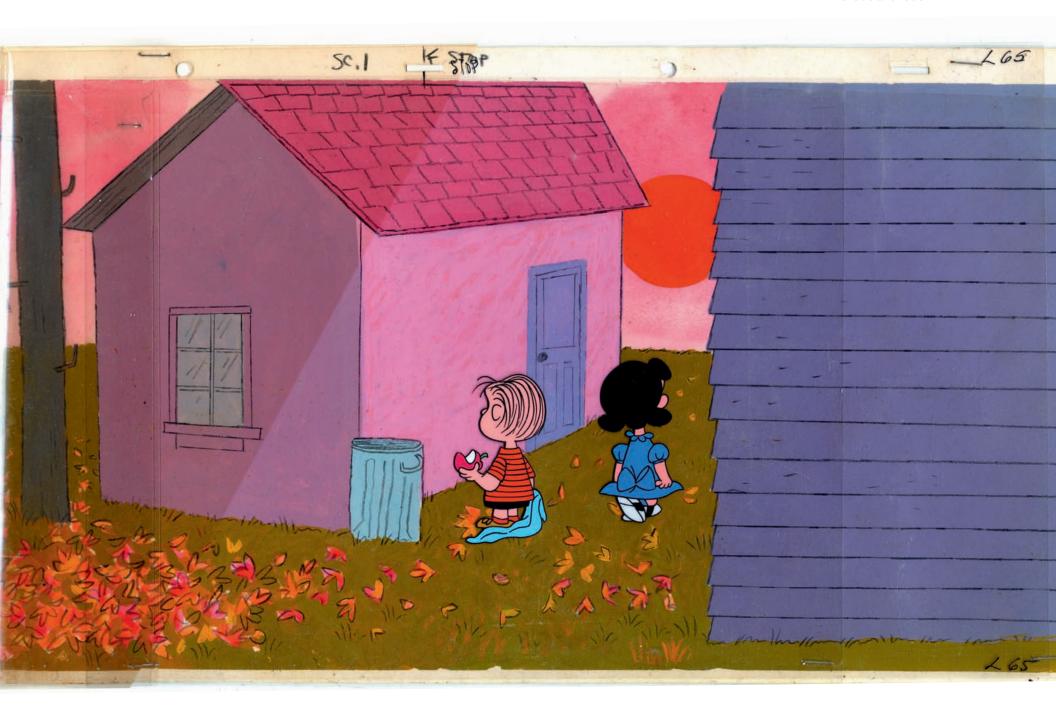
It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, 1966
Production cel

It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, 1966
Production cels
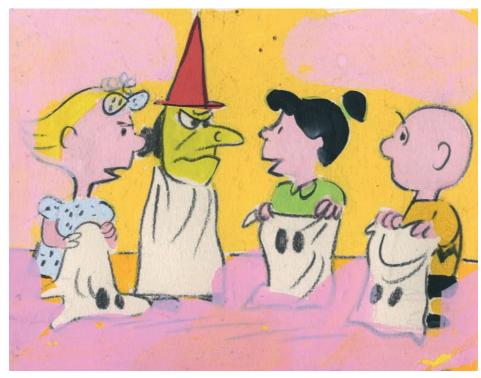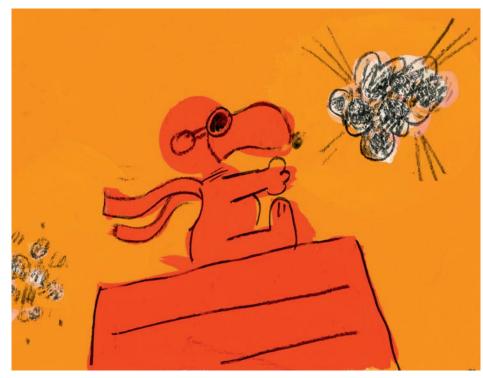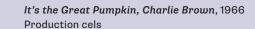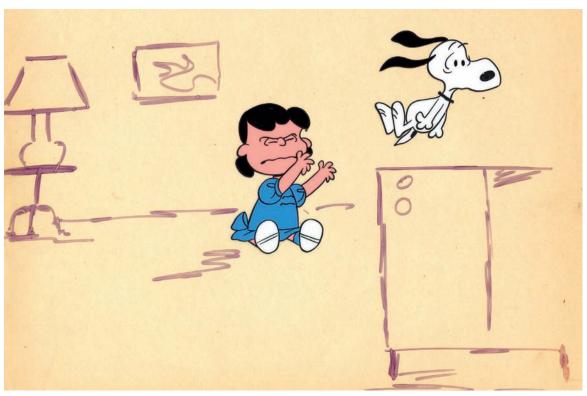
It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, 1966
Dean Spille
Graphite, watercolor, gouache

It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, 1966
Production cels
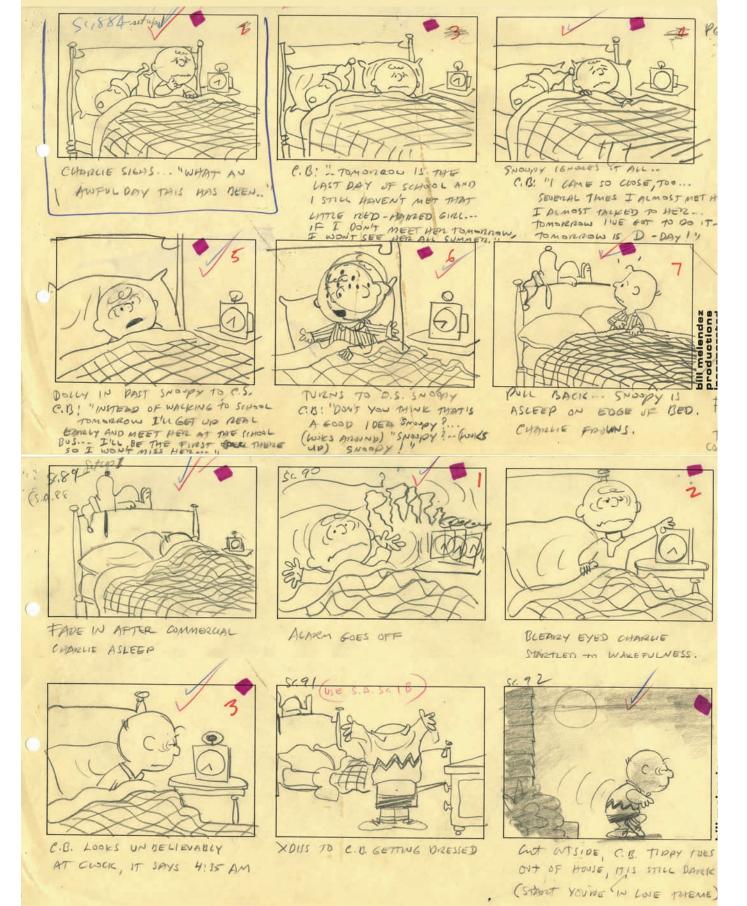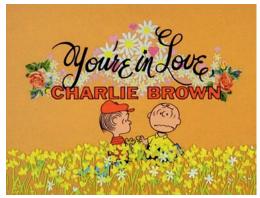
It's the Great Pumpkin, Charlie Brown, 1966
Production cels with sketched-in background
elements
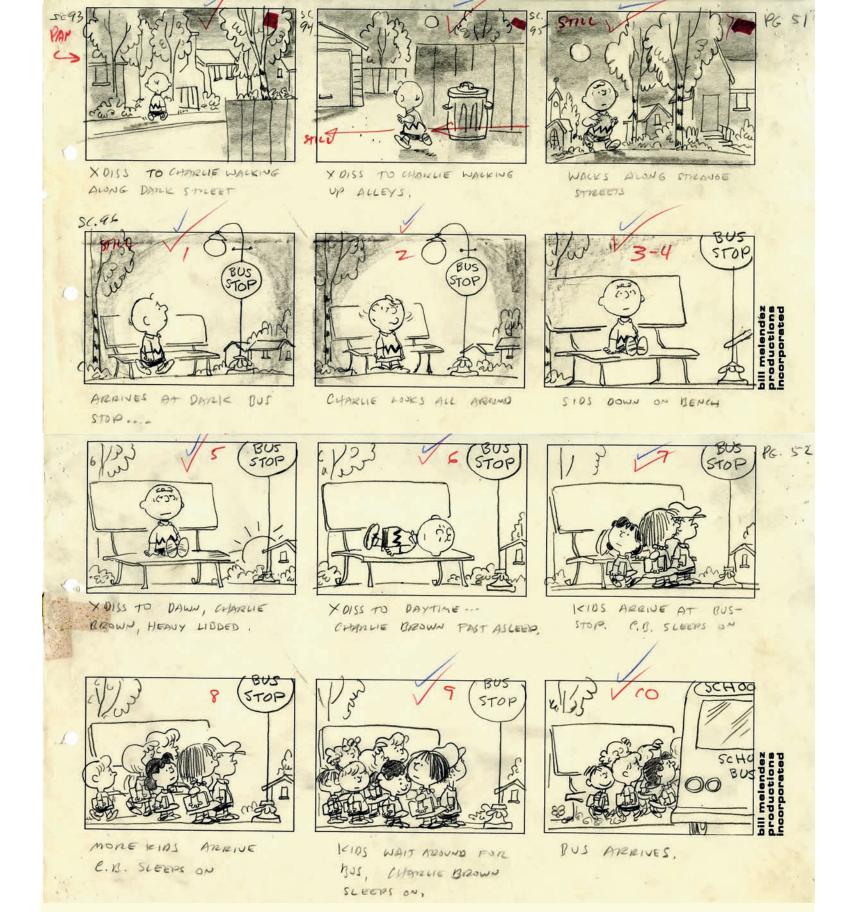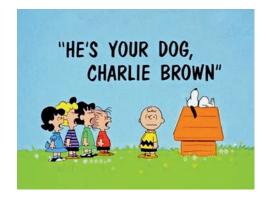
You're in Love, Charlie Brown, 1967

With her usual enthusiasm, Peppermint Patty tries to bring together two friends who she believes are star-crossed lovers—unaware that she's actually trying to match up Charlie Brown and Lucy. *You're in Love* introduced the motif of a trombone substituting the voice of an offscreen adult.

You're in Love, Charlie Brown, 1967
Artist unknown
Graphite

SC 93 PAN
X DISS TO CHARLIE WALKING ALONG DARK STREET

SC. 94
X DISS TO CHARLIE WALKING UP ALLEYS.

SC. 95 STILL PG. 51
WALKS ALONG STRANGE STREETS

SC. 96 STILL 1
ARRIVES AT DARK BUS STOP....

2
CHARLIE LOOKS ALL AROUND

3-4
SIDS DOWN ON BENCH

5 PG. 52
X DISS TO DAWN, CHARLIE BROWN, HEAVY LIDDED.

6
X DISS TO DAYTIME... CHARLIE BROWN FAST ASLEEP.

7
KIDS ARRIVE AT BUS-STOP. C.B. SLEEPS ON

8
MORE KIDS ARRIVE C.B. SLEEPS ON

9
KIDS WAIT AROUND FOR BUS, CHARLIE BROWN SLEEPS ON,

10
BUS ARRIVES.

He's Your Dog, Charlie Brown, 1968

Snoopy misbehaves so badly he drives all the kids crazy, so Charlie Brown tries to send him back to the Daisy Hill Puppy Farm for remedial training. Snoopy goes AWOL and stays with Peppermint Patty, first as a demanding guest, then as an unpaid servant. The high point of the program is Snoopy's snazzy tap dance to a jazz arrangement of Beethoven.

He's Your Dog, Charlie Brown, 1968
Production cel

He's Your Dog, Charlie Brown, 1968
Production cel

He's Your Dog, Charlie Brown, 1968
Production cels

"It's not just a limitation of what they had to work with. It's the power of the kind of animation they chose to go with. The smallest gestures take on a different significance when your motion is so limited."

PAUL FELIX, ART DIRECTOR
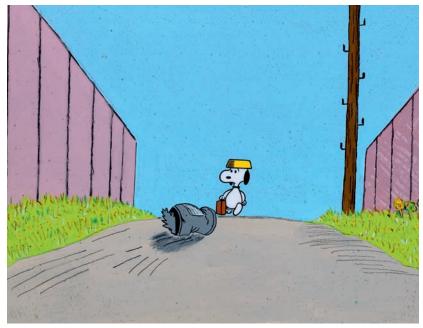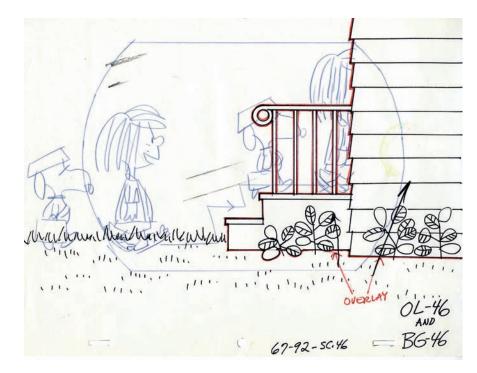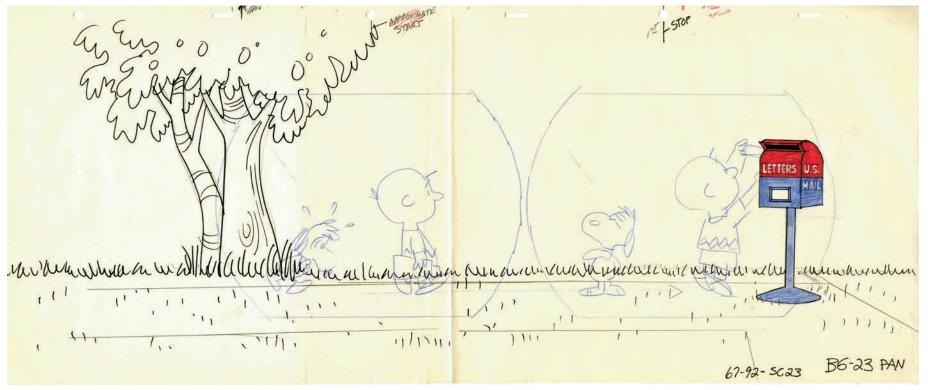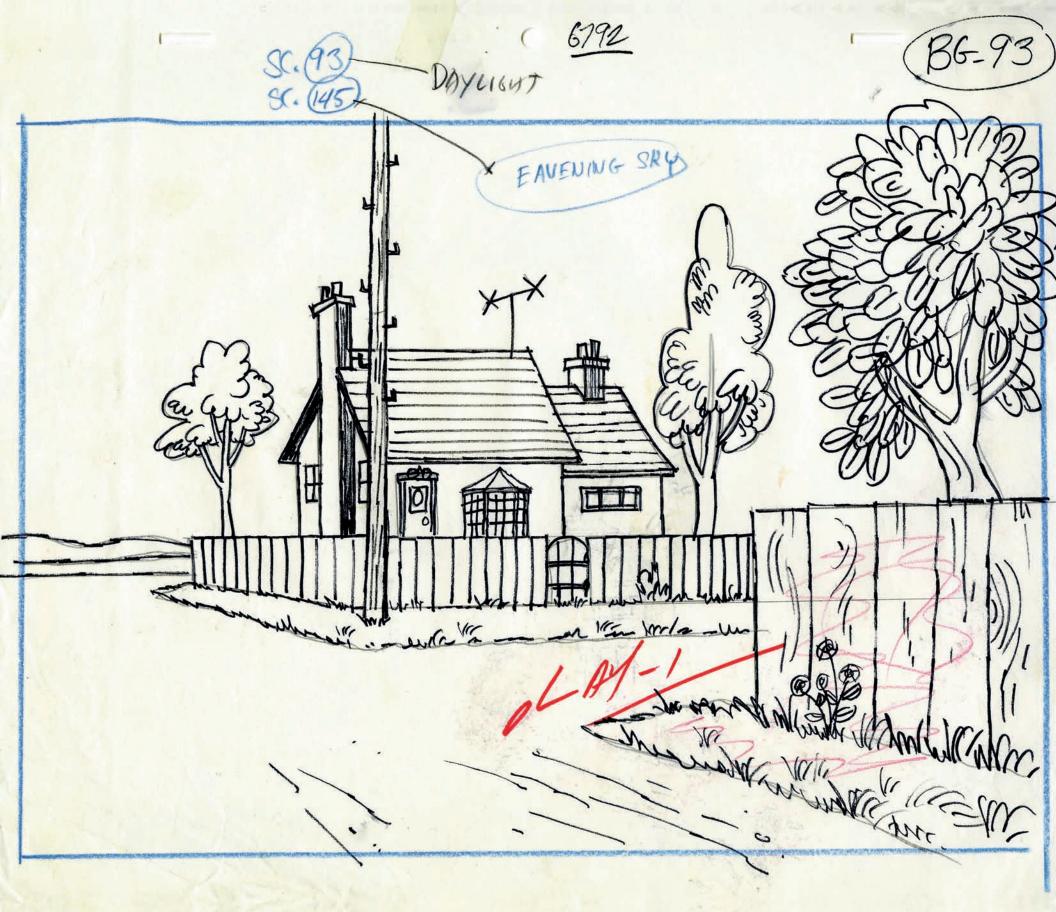
"As a director, Bill Melendez went for simple—which the strip certainly did, too. There weren't fancy camera angles and point-of-view shots. It was proscenium staging—and a very successful translation of the strip."

PETE DOCTER, DIRECTOR

He's Your Dog, Charlie Brown, 1968
Layout drawings showing the cut-off for
TV screens
Artists unknown
Graphite, ink, blue pencil
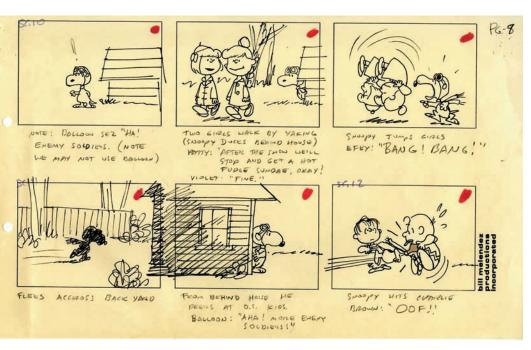
He's Your Dog, Charlie Brown, 1968
Production cels

"Since I came out of traditional Disney, I have a tendency to want to keep moving things around, change perspective, things like that. You couldn't do it with these characters: They wouldn't look right. But I would attempt it anyway; I kept trying to put too much into something that was supposed to be very, very simple." **DALE BAER, ANIMATOR**

He's Your Dog, Charlie Brown, 1968
Storyboards of Snoopy being a pest
Artist unknown
Graphite

PG. 5

ADJUSTS GOGGLES...

TAKES OFF IN ROAR

CLIMBS...

LOOKS

GESTICULATES & SHAKES FIST

ANTI-AIRCRAFT SHELLS...

bill melendez productions incorporated

Pg. 7

RAT--TAT--TAT..TAAT!

RAT.. TAT ..TAT...TAT..

COUGH.. SPLUTTER.. HAK..

bill melendez productions incorporated

SC. 89

PG. 39

TOSSES ROCK, LIKE GRENADE AT INNOCENT LINUS, PULLING CART

ROCK HITS CART. "THUD!" LINUS TAKES AS SNOOPY CHARGES

SNOOPY DIVES ON ENEMY SNOOPY: "ARRRRGH!"

ARRRGH!

SNOOPY RUNS ON LEAVING LINUS IN PILE OF CONFUSION...

CHARLIE ENTERS FROM LEFT, ASK WOOZY LINUS C.B.! "WHAT HAPPENED!!

LINUS (GROGGY): "I THINK I WAS ATTACKED BY AN ESCAPING PRISONER!"

bill melendez productions incorporated

SC.100

SC.101

SC.102

PG. 4

ZOOMM CLICK

X.DISS TO SNOOPY VACUUMS HIS ROOM LIKE MAD. (VERY ERRATICALLY, NO SYSTEM, PUSHES & STOPS, THEN IN NEW DIRECTION

X.DISS TO PEPPERMINT PATTY P.P.: "WHEN YA FINISH THE HALLWAY, START ON THE LIVING ROOM..."

CUT TO SNOOPY REACHING TO PATTY --- STOPS VACUUM

IN BURST OF ANGER HE TEARS OFF APRON---

THEN THINKS --

AND REMEMBERS

bill melendez productions incorporated

It Was a Short Summer, Charlie Brown, 1969

When they go back to school, Charlie Brown and his friends are given the standard assignment: Write five hundred words about what you did last summer—when they were all at camp. The high point of the show is the arm wrestling match between Lucy and Snoopy as "The Masked Marvel," brilliantly animated by Bill Littlejohn.

It Was a Short Summer, Charlie Brown, 1969
Production cel

THEY STRAIN IN MARVELS FAVOR.

THEY STRAIN ONE WAY...

THEN ANOTHER...

THEY STRAIN, THE TENSION MOUNTS

THE MASKED MARVEL SWEATS.

LUCY SWEATS TOO,

LUCY IS READY TO GIVE UP.

THE MASKED MARVEL IS READY TO GIVE UP. SUDDENLY......

THE MASKED MARVEL KISSES LUCY ON THE NOSE. EFX: "SMACK!"
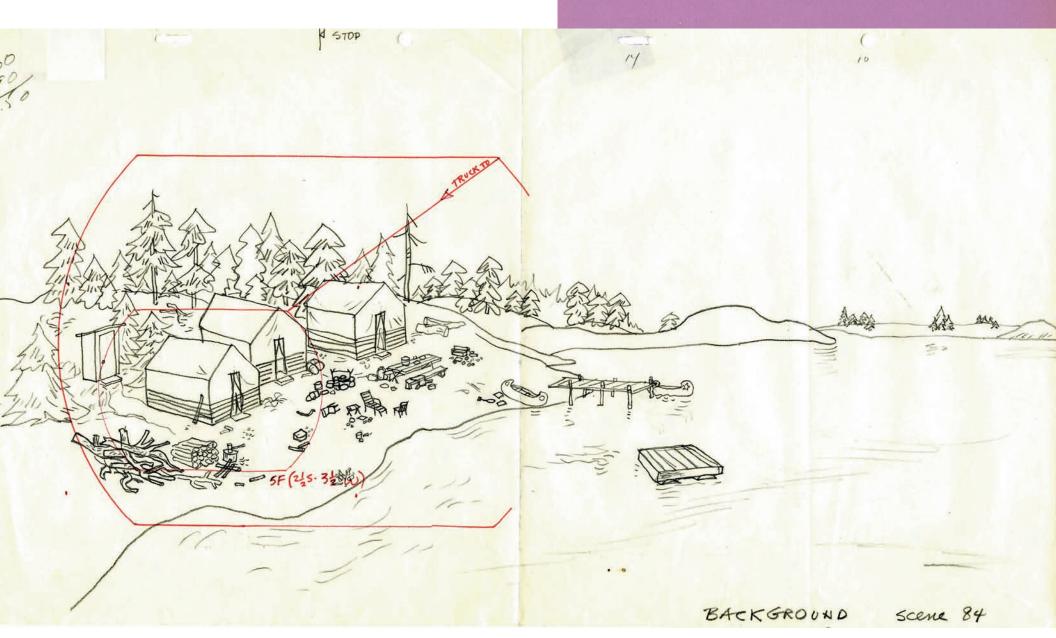
It Was a Short Summer, Charlie Brown, 1969
Storyboards of Lucy arm wrestling "The Masked
Marvel" echo Schulz's original strips
Artist unknown
Graphite

It Was a Short Summer, Charlie Brown, 1969
Production cels

"...The first day went well, we beat the boys in the swim meet...."

BACKGROUND   scene 84
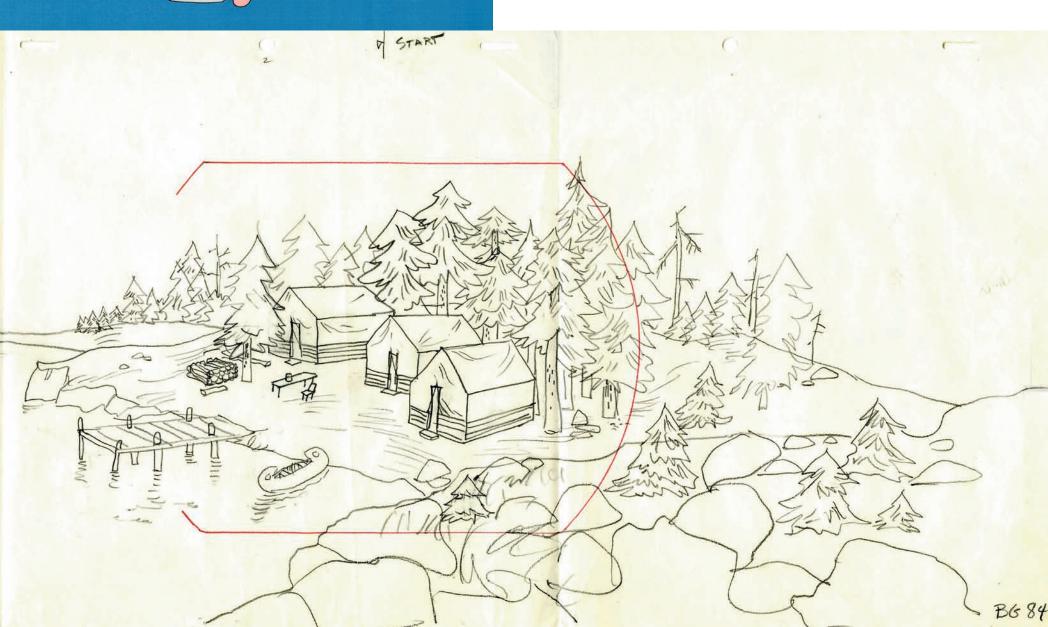
It Was a Short Summer, Charlie Brown, 1969
In this layout drawing of the two summer
camps the red lines indicate where camera
movements will begin and end
Artist unknown
Graphite
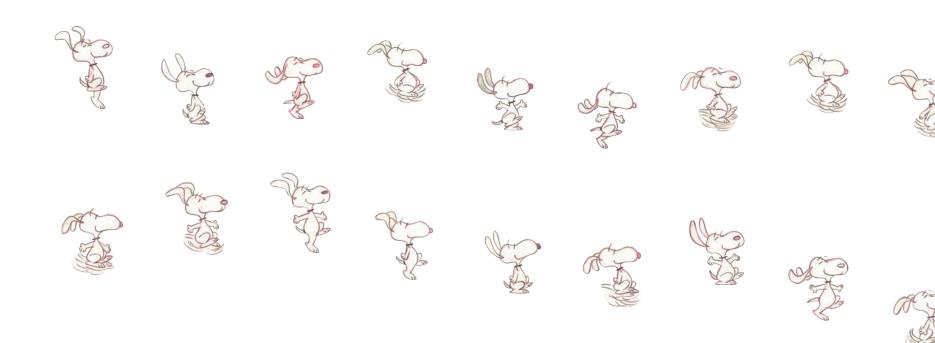
A Boy Named Charlie Brown, 1969

In the first *Peanuts* theatrical feature, Charlie Brown enters the class spelling bee. He draws words he knows, like "stomachache," and advances to the national championship in New York City—only to blow it in the last round. The film offers some Day-Glo fantasy sequences, including Snoopy skating on the ice at Rockefeller Center, imagining himself as a hockey star.

A Boy Named Charlie Brown, 1969
Dean Spille
Gouache

Above:
A Boy Named Charlie Brown, 1969
Animation drawings
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite, red pencil

Bottom:
A Boy Named Charlie Brown, 1969
Dean Spille
Gouache
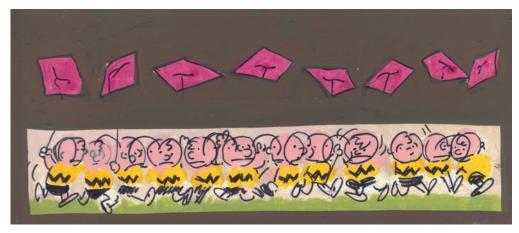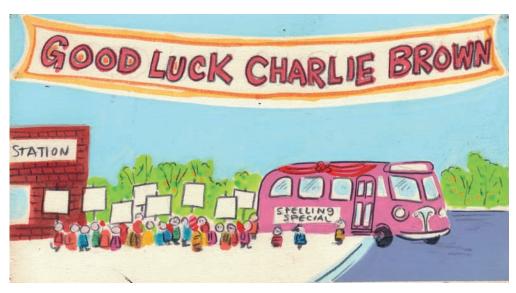
A Boy Named Charlie Brown, 1969
Dean Spille
Graphite, watercolor, gouache

A Boy Named Charlie Brown, 1969
Dean Spille
Graphite, watercolor, gouache
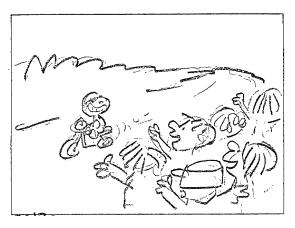
The '70s

Snoopy, Come Home, 1972
Production cel

In *A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving* (1973), Peppermint Patty invites herself, Marcie, and Franklin over to Charlie Brown's for the holiday dinner—even though he's supposed to go to his grandmother's. Snoopy and Woodstock cater, serving popcorn, toast, and candy. As they arrange the table, Snoopy gets into an impromptu wrestling match with a recalcitrant beach chair—the high point of the show.

When Peppermint Patty complains about the food, Linus explains the origins of the Thanksgiving holiday in a scene reminiscent of his reading of the Gospel in *A Charlie Brown Christmas*. Stephen Shea, who had taken over as the voice of Linus, says ruefully, "At the end of the Thanksgiving special, all the kids get into the car and head to Charlie Brown's grandmother's condo singing 'Over the River and Through the Woods.' I had to sing by myself in the studio, and I felt pretty self-conscious about my voice. Once everything was spliced together, it blended with other kids who could sing better, so I don't feel so bad about it. But I can still hear my sore thumb kind of sticking out there."

You're a Good Sport, Charlie Brown, 1975
Storyboard
Artist unknown
Graphite

Craig Schulz notes that the motocross race in *You're a Good Sport, Charlie Brown* (1975) is an example of a special reflecting his family's interests: "My life was often mimicked in the strip. The helicopter strips are tied to when I was flying helicopters. The motocross strips and the motocross TV show were based on my motorcycle racing. Obviously Dad watched all of this. Same thing with [my sisters] Jill and Amy with their ice skating: All those things got into the animation and the strip."

The third *Peanuts* feature, *Race for Your Life, Charlie Brown* (1977), came out of an unsuccessful vacation. "In 1974, we took a trip down the Rogue River in rafts," says Jeannie Schulz. "It was a disastrous trip, because it rained a lot. But Sparky said, 'We should do a Charlie Brown . . .' He was always thinking in animated terms. He realized what he couldn't do in the comic strip. But he thought in animated terms, too, and what was appropriate for his characters that he couldn't draw."

At Camp Remote, Charlie Brown, Linus, Franklin, and Schroeder raft down the nearby river, competing with three unnamed bullies and their nasty cat Brutus—and against Peppermint Patty, Lucy, Sally, and Marcie. Ultimately, Woodstock wins the race.

A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving, 1973
Production cel

That same year, *It's Your First Kiss, Charlie Brown* (1977) once again showed Charlie Brown trying to kick the football and Lucy yanking it away. But instead of the joke taking place in someone's yard, it was during an interscholastic football game. Every time Charlie Brown missed the kick, his teammates criticized him for "goofing up." Mendelson reports that although the show earned high ratings, these scenes generated a minor controversy: "Many viewers wrote letters saying that this was simply more than they could take—Charlie Brown was not at fault, period. Sparky, Bill Melendez, and I agreed, so for the repeat broadcast we dubbed out the 'goofing-up' references."

One of Schulz's favorite specials was *What a Nightmare, Charlie Brown* (1978), which also grew out of his 1974 vacation. Jeannie Schulz remembers, "When we were in Alaska, we went to a sled dog place, and are they on short leashes! Sometime later, Sparky said, 'How would it be if Snoopy had to become a real dog, if he had to learn to fend for himself, if he couldn't get away with his semi-human shenanigans?' He really liked that story, because it came out of imagining Snoopy changing his personality."

It's a Mystery, Charlie Brown, 1974
Dean Spille
Graphite, watercolor
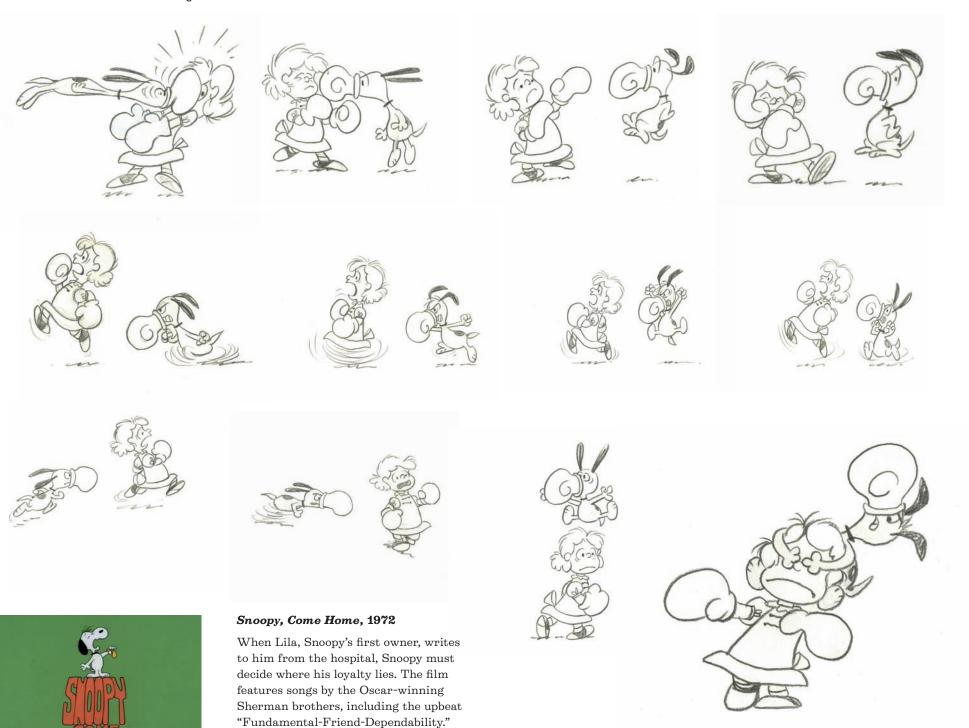
What a Nightmare, Charlie Brown, 1978
Production cel of Snoopy and the pizzas that will give him the Yukon dream

As his overcivilized self, Snoopy bakes and eats pizzas before going to bed. He dreams he's a sled dog in the Klondike. But in the world of real dogs, Snoopy is too weak and unsure of himself to compete for food and a warm place to sleep. When the musher stops near a town, Snoopy sneaks into a saloon, plays the piano, and gets dealt into a poker game. Eventually Snoopy becomes the lead dog by outfighting the alpha husky. Almost the entire program is done in pantomime, which the artists enjoyed.

"I did a lot of animation for *Nightmare*: It was fun; it was a lot of action, with the dogs and the scenes in the bar," says Sam Jaimes. "I did the scene where he's playing cards. I enjoyed that immensely, because it was all facial expressions."

Melendez said, "One of my favorites of all time is *What a Nightmare, Charlie Brown*; I thought it was very well done. I see it now, and I'm surprised it was that good."

Snoopy, Come Home, 1972
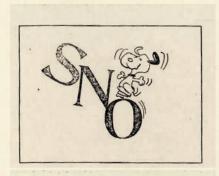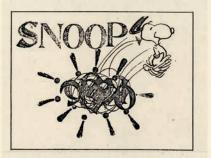
When Lila, Snoopy's first owner, writes to him from the hospital, Snoopy must decide where his loyalty lies. The film features songs by the Oscar-winning Sherman brothers, including the upbeat "Fundamental-Friend-Dependability." *Snoopy, Come Home* is generally regarded as the best of the *Peanuts* features.
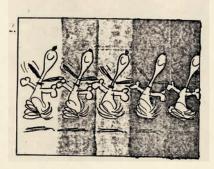
Snoopy, Come Home, 1972
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

Snoopy, Come Home, 1972
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

Right:
Photocopies of the storyboards for the title sequence

"Schulz directed me specifically. He was kind of quiet, soft-spoken, and not in any way intimidating; almost fatherly. He seemed to be enjoying it." **STEPHEN SHEA, VOICE ACTOR**

Opposite:
Snoopy, Come Home, 1972
Dean Spille
Gouache

This page:
Snoopy, Come Home, 1972
Production cels

Snoopy, Come Home, 1972
Title sequence
Artist unknown

You're Not Elected, Charlie Brown, 1972
Below:
Promotional image for the cover of
TV Guide
Charles M. Schulz
Ink, watercolor

You're Not Elected, Charlie Brown, 1972

Linus runs for school president with Lucy and Charlie Brown managing his campaign. It looks like he has the election in the bag—until he uses a school assembly to deliver a speech about the Great Pumpkin. Snoopy appears for the first time as Joe Cool.

108

You're Not Elected, Charlie Brown, 1972
Below and left:
Production cels
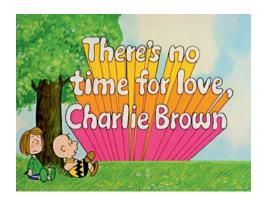
There's No Time for Love, Charlie Brown, 1973

Charlie Brown, Peppermint Patty, Marcie, and Sally set off on a field trip to an art museum and end up in a grocery store by mistake. Charlie Brown's feelings are hurt when he overhears Peppermint Patty describe him as dull and boring, but he gets an "A" on his report describing the store as a museum.
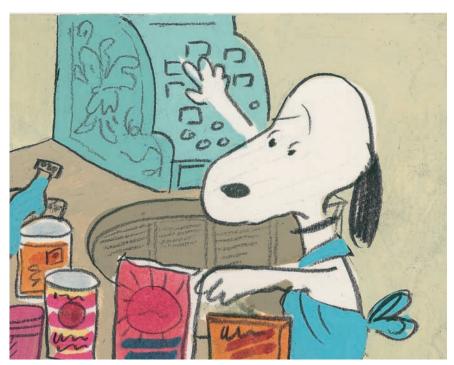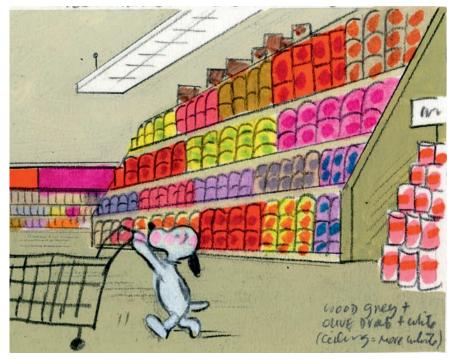
All images:
There's No Time for Love, Charlie Brown, 1973
Dean Spille
Graphite, pen, watercolor, gouache

A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving, 1973

Peppermint Patty invites herself, Marcie, and Franklin to Charlie Brown's house for the traditional holiday meal—but he's supposed to go to his grandmother's. The situation eventually gets sorted out, after Snoopy and Woodstock try to cater the event. In one memorable scene, Snoopy fights with a collapsible beach chair.
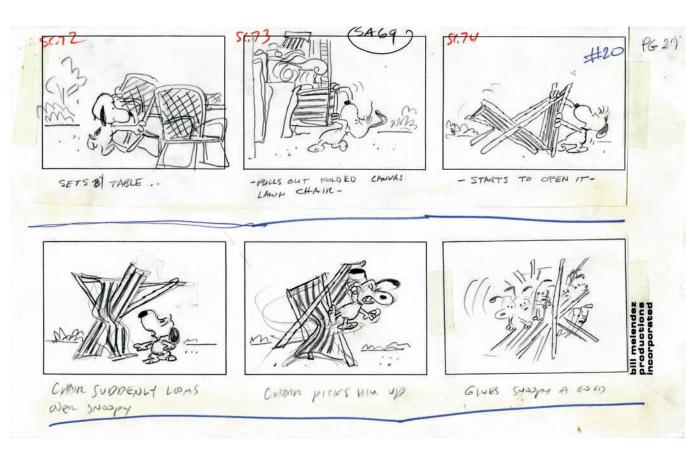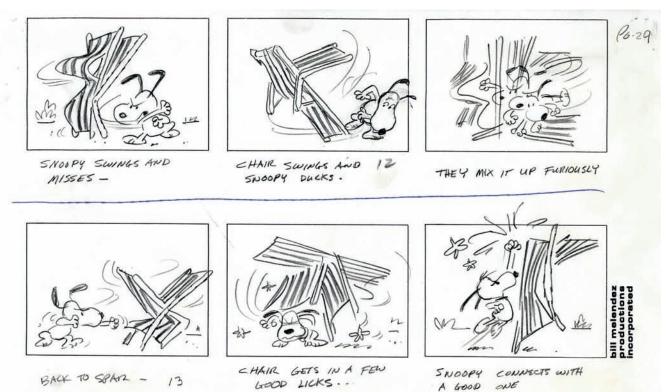
A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving, 1973
Top seven images:
Dean Spille
Gouache

Bottom seven images and opposite
Production cels

A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving, 1973
Storyboards of Snoopy fighting with
the beach chair
Artist unknown
Graphite, ink
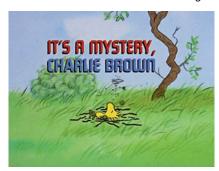
A Charlie Brown Thanksgiving, 1973
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

It's a Mystery, Charlie Brown, 1974

Woodstock's nest has disappeared, and he enlists Snoopy to help him track down the thief. Sally has taken it to the school science fair. When she returns it, she re-creates Pavlov's experiments with Snoopy as a subject.

It's a Mystery, Charlie Brown, 1974
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

It's a Mystery, Charlie Brown, 1974
Above and opposite:
Dean Spille
Graphite, watercolor
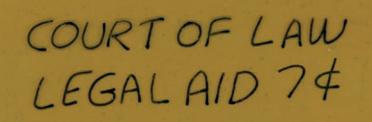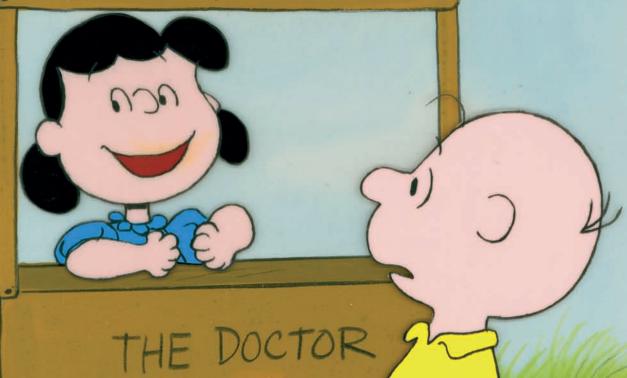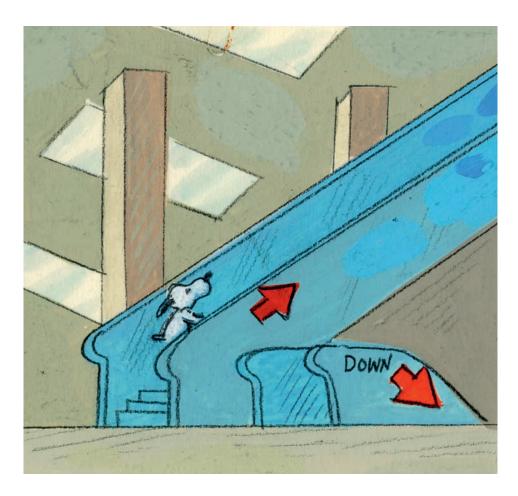
It's a Mystery, Charlie Brown, 1974
Production cels
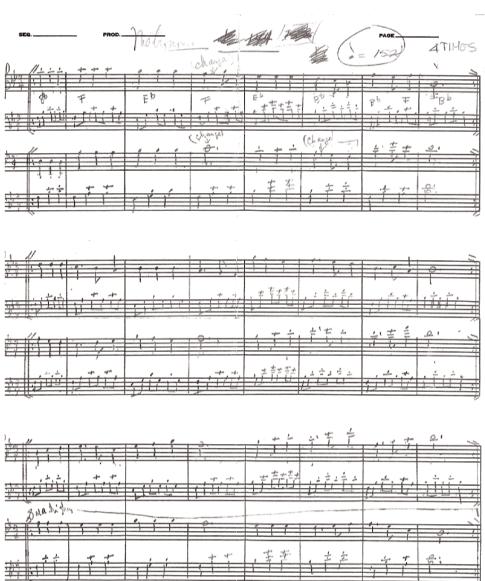
***It's the Easter Beagle, Charlie Brown*, 1974**

Peppermint Patty and Marcie try to dye Easter eggs, but Marcie keeps breaking and cooking them, requiring another trip to the store. Linus insists that coloring eggs is a waste of time because the Easter Beagle will bring them—which proves partially correct.

120

Above left:
It's the Easter Beagle, Charlie Brown, 1974
Dean Spille
Graphite, watercolor

Above:
It's the Easter Beagle, Charlie Brown, 1974
Easter Beagle Score
Vince Guaraldi

It's the Easter Beagle, Charlie Brown, 1974
Production cel
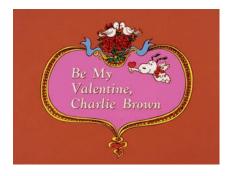
Be My Valentine, Charlie Brown, 1975
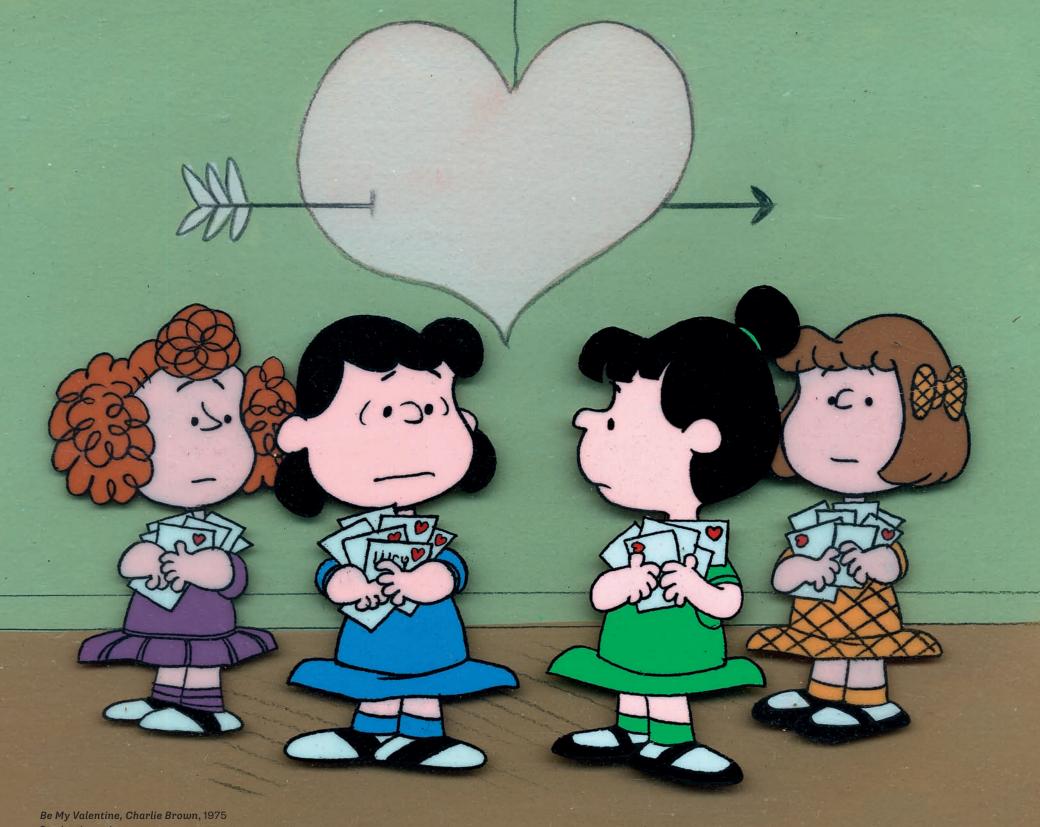
Linus is smitten with his teacher, Miss Othmar, and prepares an elaborate valentine—that Sally thinks she's going to get. Meanwhile, Lucy warns Schroeder about the dangers of lost love, and Violet offers Charlie Brown a late valentine, infuriating Schroeder.

This spread
Be My Valentine, Charlie Brown, 1975
Dean Spille
Graphite, watercolor

Be My Valentine, Charlie Brown, 1975
Production cels

Be My Valentine, Charlie Brown, 1975
Dean Spille
Watercolor
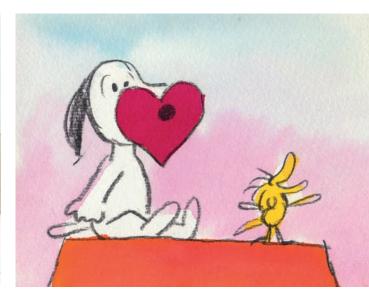
You're a Good Sport, Charlie Brown, 1975

Peppermint Patty gets Charlie Brown involved in a
motocross race, although he only has a ramshackle
bike. One of his opponents is The Masked Marvel,
a.k.a. Snoopy. The list of contestants includes
P. Roman and S. Jaimes—Melendez Studio artists
Phil Roman and Sam Jaimes.
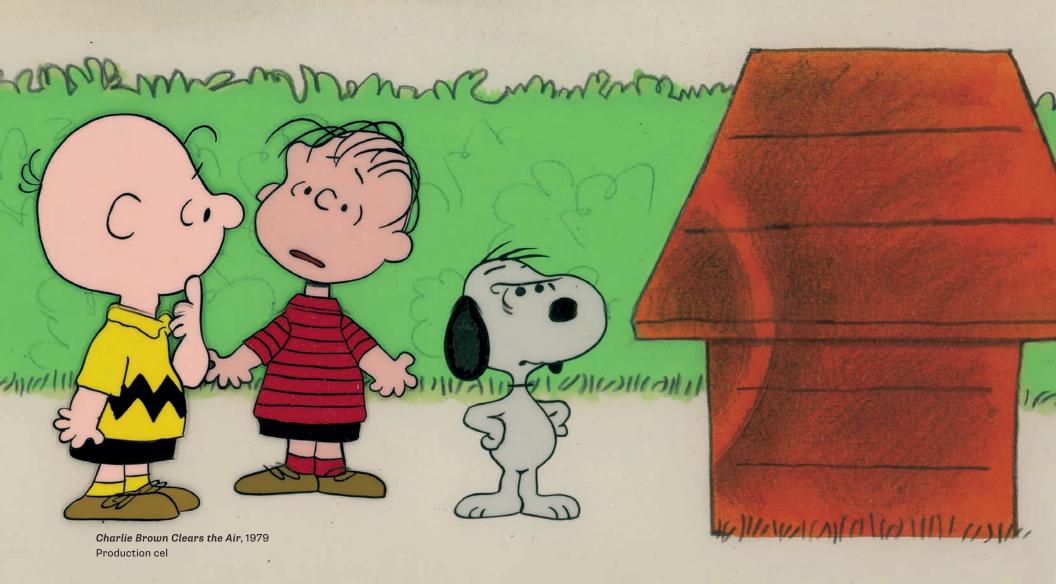
You're a Good Sport, Charlie Brown, 1975
Dean Spille
Watercolor

"Schulz's characters look simple, but they're not simple. You change just a little line, and it's not the character." ROBERTO CASALE, ANIMATOR

Charlie Brown Clears the Air, 1979

Charlie Brown gets depressed after losing a baseball game because of the increased air pollution and trash at the ball field. He decides to do a presentation at his school about the dangers of air pollution and improperly disposed of trash. Only six minutes long, this special was a collaboration between the American Lung Association, the United States Environmental Protection Agency, and the *Peanuts* animation group.

Charlie Brown Clears the Air, 1979
Production cel
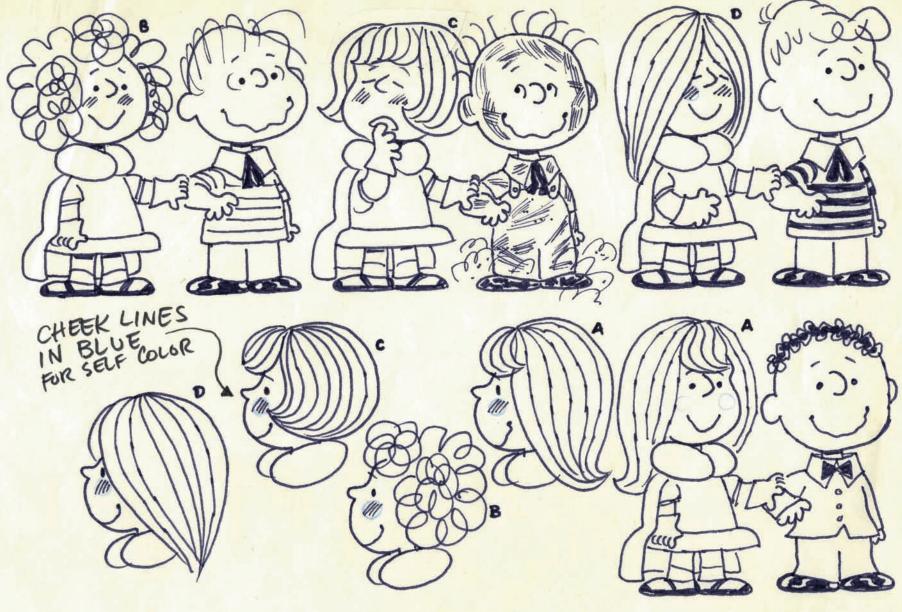
It's Arbor Day, Charlie Brown, 1976

After Linus reads to Sally about the origins of the Arbor Day holiday, she and the other girls turn Charlie Brown's baseball field into a forested park, with a tree growing on the pitcher's mound. Snoopy struggles with a recalcitrant vine, and Rerun makes his first appearance on the back of his mom's bike.

It's Arbor Day, Charlie Brown, 1976
Production cel

It's Your First Kiss, Charlie Brown, 1977
Artist unknown
Ink

CHEEK LINES
IN BLUE
FOR SELF COLOR

PRINCESSES

It's Your First Kiss, Charlie Brown, 1977

Heather, the Little Red-Haired Girl of Charlie Brown's dreams, is chosen homecoming queen. And Charlie Brown is supposed to escort her to an after-game dance, waltz with her, and give her her first kiss! The filmmakers changed some of the dialogue when viewers complained it was unfair for Charlie Brown's teammates to boo him for missing a field goal after Lucy had snatched the ball away before he could kick it.
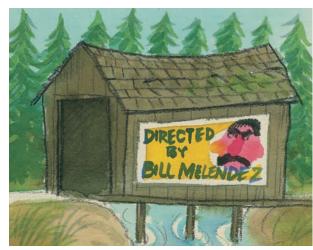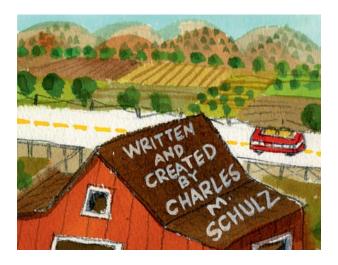
Race for Your Life, Charlie Brown, 1977

Charlie Brown and the gang are sent to Camp Remote for the summer. The principal activity at camp is a long river race that pits the four boys (Charlie Brown, Linus, Schroeder, and Franklin) against the four girls (Sally, Lucy, Peppermint Patty, and Marcie)—and both of them against a team of bullies. The film was inspired by a rafting trip Schulz and his wife took on the Rogue River in 1974.

Race for Your Life, Charlie Brown, 1977
Dean Spille
Watercolor

131

What a Nightmare, Charlie Brown, 1978
Dean Spille
Watercolor

What a Nightmare, Charlie Brown, 1978

Snoopy eats too many pizzas before bedtime—and has a nightmare that he's a sled dog in Alaska. Told almost entirely in mime, Nightmare juxtaposes animation of Snoopy running on all fours like a real dog with him playing the piano and dealing poker in a Yukon saloon.

What a Nightmare, Charlie Brown, 1978
Production cel

What a Nightmare, Charlie Brown, 1978
Dean Spille
Watercolor

What a Nightmare, Charlie Brown, 1978
Artist unknown
Graphite, blue pencil

This Is America, Charlie Brown: The Birth of the Constitution, 1988
Production cel of the characters in eighteenth century Philadelphia

The '80s

The '80s was a decade of ambitious projects for Schulz, Melendez, and Mendelson, including some of the most unusual specials in the *Peanuts* canon. For *She's a Good Skate, Charlie Brown* (1980), Schulz insisted Peppermint Patty's skating routine had to be correctly executed: He had carefully researched the poses he used in the related strips, which ran in November and December 1974. The animators studied the routines of three professional skaters: Mary Ellen Kinsey, Karen Hutton, and Amy Schulz, the cartoonist's daughter. They shot footage of the skaters and used blow-ups of individual frames of film to create the animated routines.

"Every special presented a different challenge," explains director Phil Roman. "For *She's a Good Skate*, they shot live footage, then sent me rotoscoped photographs. I used them for the timing, but in the photos, you've got a big adult with long legs: The strides, the push-offs, the turns are different for a little kid with short legs and a big head. Bill Littlejohn animated it, but I did all the timing and the pan moves, because the background moved with the character."

When Snoopy messes up Peppermint Patty's tape, Woodstock whistles the music for her routine, "O Mio Babbino Caro" from Puccini's *Gianni Schicchi*, apparently a

She's a Good Skate, Charlie Brown, 1980
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

favorite of Schulz's. Woodstock's "voice" was provided by a musician named Jason Serinus, who had sent Mendelson a tape of his bird whistles a year earlier.

The artists followed *She's a Good Skate* with two very funny specials: *Life Is a Circus, Charlie Brown* (1980) and *It's Magic, Charlie Brown* (1981). In *Circus*, Snoopy is so smitten with Fifi, a performing French poodle, he joins the show to impress her. Miss Polly, who owns Fifi, changes Snoopy's name to Hugo the Great and makes him perform on the unicycle and the trapeze. Snoopy gradually masters both pieces of equipment, going from panic to flashy skill. But when Polly dyes him pink, he beats a hasty retreat back to Charlie Brown's house.

The mischievous beagle gets a book of magic tricks from the library in the latter special. He casts spells on Woodstock, making the bird's feet and head grow huge. But Snoopy outwits himself when he turns Charlie Brown invisible and can't make him reappear.

Schulz appeared on camera to introduce *A Charlie Brown Celebration* (1982), explaining that some stories in the strip might last only a few days, while others went on for several weeks. The program was an anthology that included some single strip gags and such longer sequences as Peppermint Patty attending Ace Obedience School, thinking it's a private academy.

The anthology format continued in *The Charlie Brown and Snoopy Show*, a Saturday morning program that ran from September 17, 1983, to August 3, 1986. "We broke the half hours into three segments," Mendelson says. "One would be a long story—maybe twelve minutes, another might be six minutes, and one three minutes. We took them right out of the comic strip."

Although Mendelson praises the quality of the Saturday morning series, Schulz apparently didn't share his enthusiasm. He continues, "We had done eighteen shows when Sparky called and said, 'I don't want to do any more.' It wasn't that he didn't like the Saturday morning shows. He just didn't want to spend any more time on them,
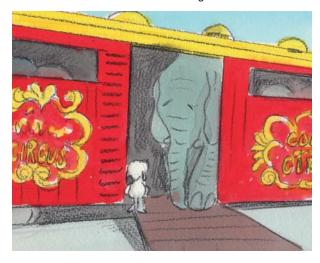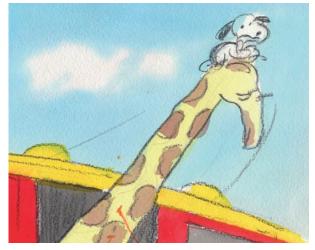
Charles M. Schulz and Lee Mendelson look over storyboards at Schulz's Studio, Number One Snoopy Place, circa 1975.

as a series takes a lot more time than a special. So I called the network and told them, 'He doesn't want to do any more. And I can't make them.' That's why the series lasted only eighteen shows. He was the boss and he made the decisions."

In 1985, the filmmakers presented an hour-long adaptation of the hit musical *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*. The show used live actors to evoke Schulz's characters; the animated programs presented them literally, and the premises failed to mesh. After decades of listening to Bill Melendez's howls and sobs, it was disorienting to hear Snoopy sing in an adult's voice. Similar problems marred the adaptation of *Snoopy: The Musical* three years later.
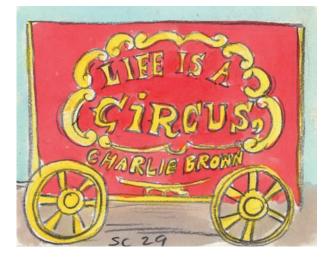
Life Is a Circus, Charlie Brown, 1980

Snoopy is so smitten with Fifi the performing poodle that he leaves Charlie Brown's house and joins the circus. He learns to ride a unicycle, does a high-wire act, and performs on the flying trapeze in very funny sequences. But when Holly, Fifi's owner, tries to dye him pink, Snoopy quits the show and returns home.

Life Is a Circus, Charlie Brown, 1980
Dean Spille
Watercolor

Life Is a Circus, Charlie Brown, 1980
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

LIfe Is a Circus, Charlie Brown, 1980
Production cel
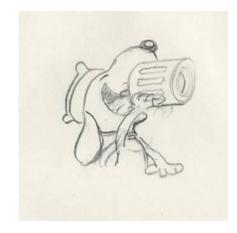
Bon Voyage, Charlie Brown, 1980

The fourth and final *Peanuts* theatrical film sends Charlie Brown, Linus, Peppermint Patty, Marcie, and Snoopy to France as exchange students. During a stopover at Heathrow, Snoopy visits Wimbledon for an impromptu tennis match. The kids investigate the eerie *Château Mal Voisin* ("Bad Neighbor"), which is based on a *château* where Schulz stayed as a serviceman during World War II.

Bon Voyage, Charlie Brown, 1980
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

Bon Voyage, Charlie Brown, 1980
Dean Spille
Watercolor
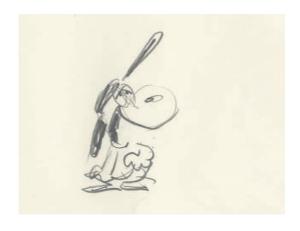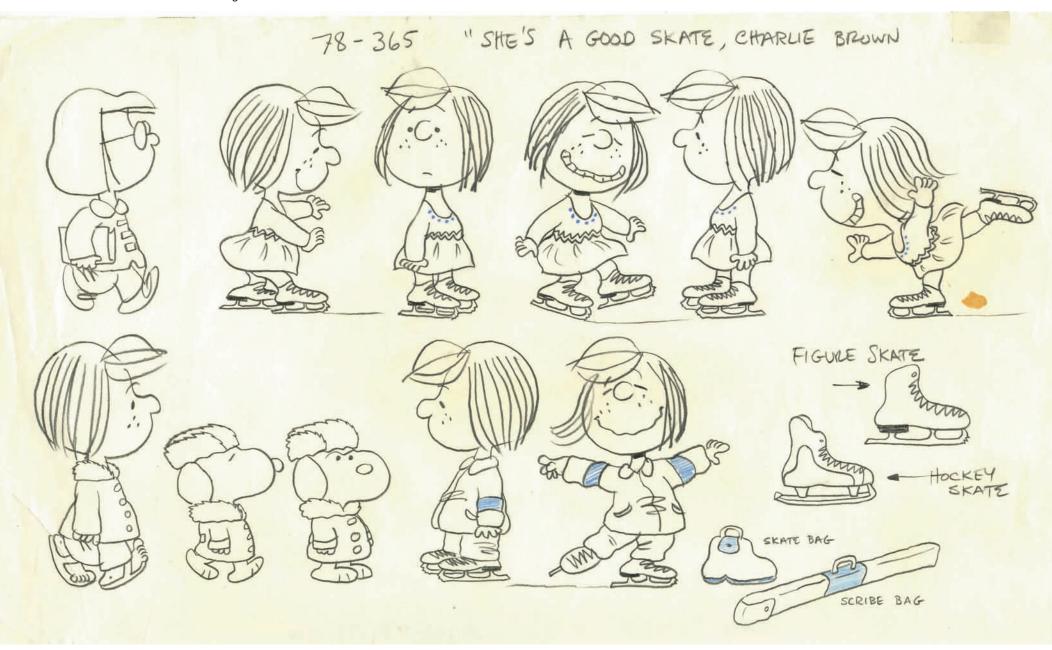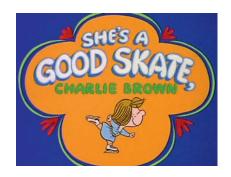
Bon Voyage, Charlie Brown, 1980
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

78-365 "SHE'S A GOOD SKATE, CHARLIE BROWN

FIGURE SKATE

HOCKEY SKATE

SKATE BAG

SCRIBE BAG
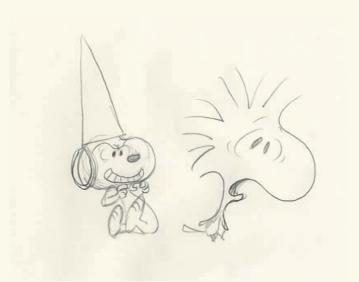
She's a Good Skate, Charlie Brown, 1980

Snoopy serves as Peppermint Patty's coach as she trains for a figure skating competition—and as her tailor when Marcie fails to sew a suitable skating outfit. Snoopy messes up the tape for her routine, and Woodstock performs Puccini's "O Mio Babbino Caro," a favorite of Schulz's. Because Schulz insisted that all the skating moves be animated correctly, the artists worked from live-action footage of three professional skaters, including Schulz's daughter Amy.

It's Magic, Charlie Brown, 1981

Charlie Brown and Linus take Snoopy to the library, where he finds a book of magic spells that really work—which he discovers when he tries them out on Woodstock. He puts on a magic show with Marcie and Sally as his assistants, and makes Charlie Brown disappear—only to realize that the spell to make him reappear *doesn't* work.
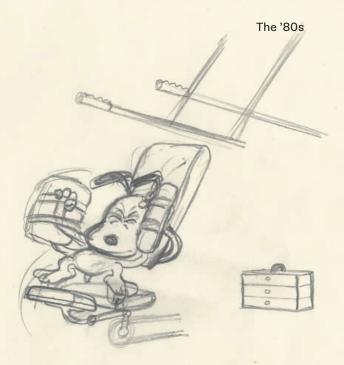
It's Magic, Charlie Brown, 1981
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

Someday You'll Find Her, Charlie Brown, 1981

Charlie Brown falls for a beautiful little girl he sees in a "honey shot" during a televised football game. With Linus's help, he tries to find her, but they keep meeting girls who are too old, too unattractive, et cetera. But when they find Mary Jo, the discovery backfires.

Someday You'll Find Her, Charlie Brown, 1981
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

147
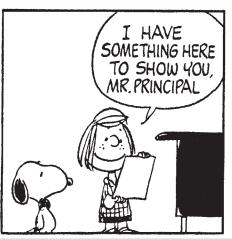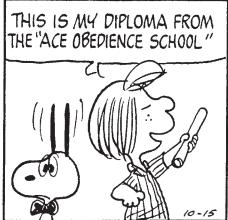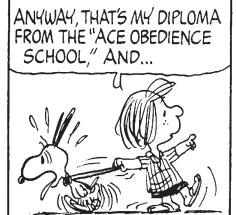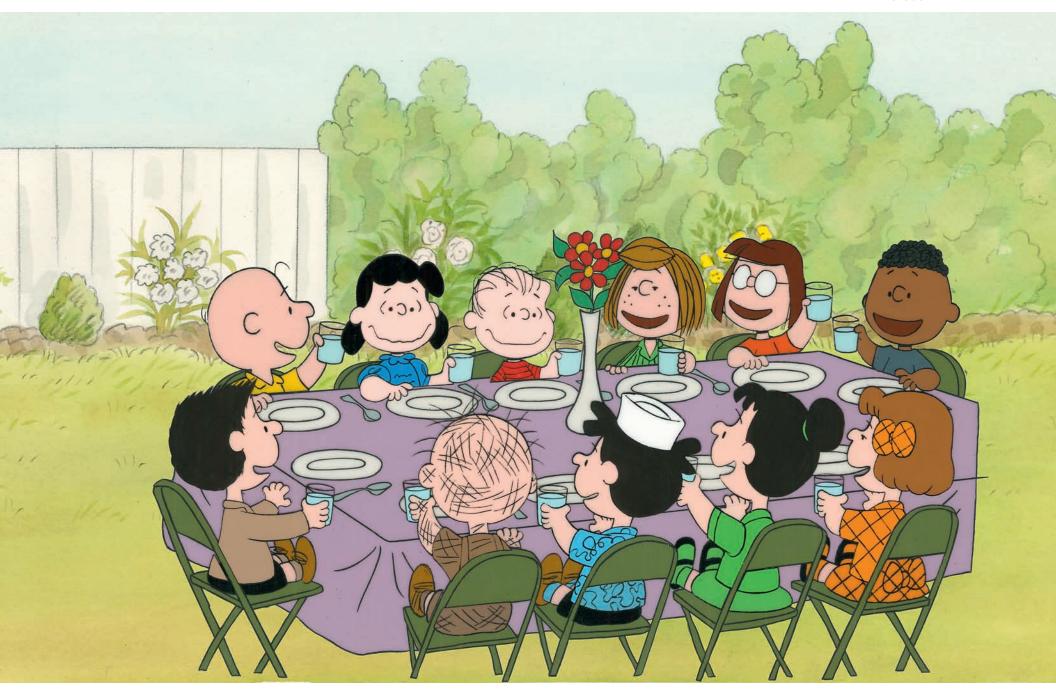
A Charlie Brown Celebration, **1982**

In this hour-long live-action/
animation combination, Charles
Schulz introduces animated segments
of different lengths that include

Peppermint Patty mistakenly
enrolling in the Ace Obedience
School and Linus disarming a
crabby Lucy by announcing she has
a little brother who loves her.

Top row:
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

Middle and bottom row:
Original *Peanuts* strips by
Charles M. Schulz

Is this Goodbye, Charlie Brown?, 1983

Linus and Lucy's dad gets a new job, so they move away, leaving a stunned Charlie Brown and Schroeder. Snoopy caters a touching farewell lunch. All ends happily when Mr. Van Pelt doesn't like the new job and moves the family back.

Is this Goodbye, Charlie Brown?, 1983
Production cel

149

What Have We Learned, Charlie Brown?, 1983

Subtitled "A Tribute," this special picks up where *Bon Voyage, Charlie Brown* ended. As Charlie Brown, Linus, Peppermint Patty, Marcie, and Snoopy leave Château Mal Voisin, Linus realizes they're near Omaha Beach. The D-Day landing is invoked with rotoscoped live-action footage. The gang visits the American cemetery and Linus recites part of "In Flanders Fields" at Ypres. Schulz was particularly proud of this program.

What Have We Learned, Charlie Brown?, 1983
Above:
Production cel
Below:
Artist unknown
Graphite
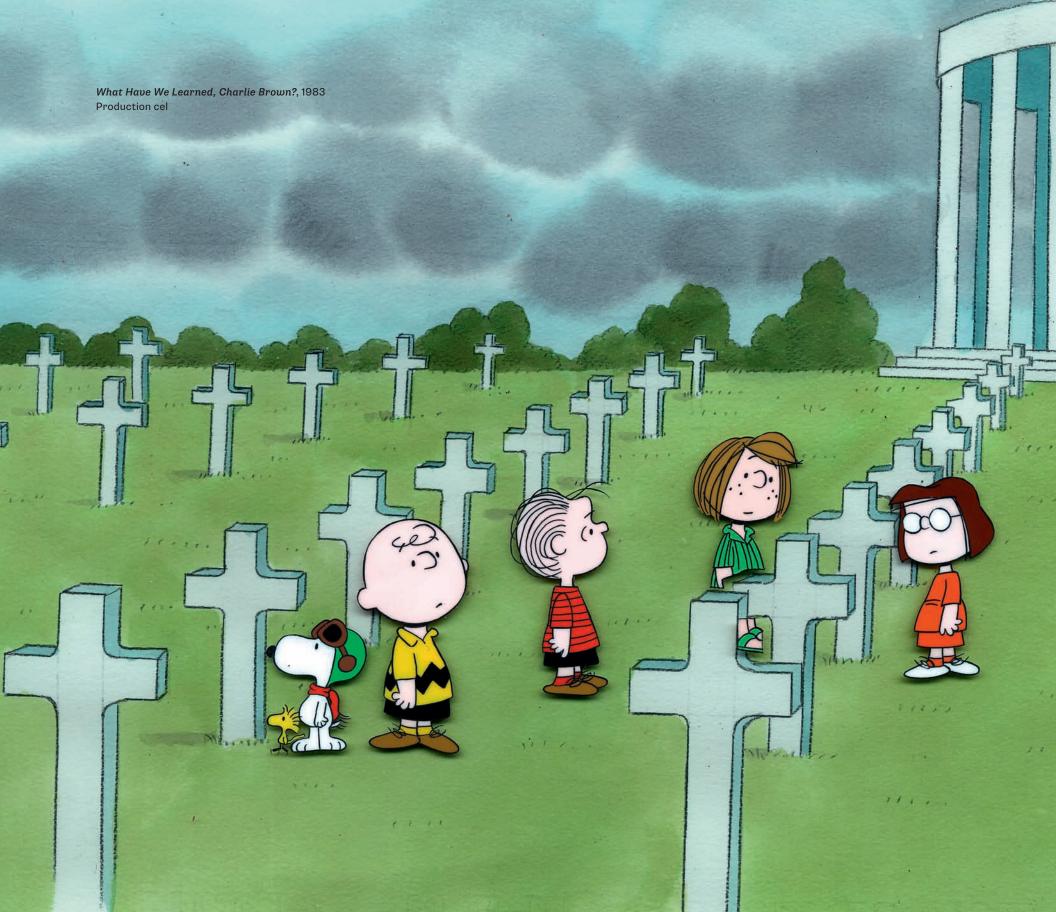
What Have We Learned, Charlie Brown?, 1983
Production cel

Above:
MetLife Commercial, 1986
Graphite, watercolor, gouache
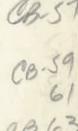
Opposite:
MetLife Commercial, 1986
Snoopy displays his form on the court; animator Bill
Littlejohn remained an avid tennis player into his eighties
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

"Our lunches with Sparky were pretty calm and collected. The clients with the commercials would come in, and Bill would wine and dine them. But with Sparky, we'd always have sandwiches in the studio." **EVERT BROWN, PRODUCTION DESIGNER**

You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown, 1985

This one-hour special is a pared-down animated version of the hit musical comedy, with the songs performed by animated versions of the *Peanuts* characters, rather than live actors.

You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown, 1985
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

Snoopy: The Musical, 1988

This is a one-hour adaptation of the second *Peanuts* musical, similar to the 1985 reworking of *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown*.

Snoopy: The Musical, 1988
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

***This Is America, Charlie Brown:
The NASA Space Station*, 1988**

In the eight-part series, *This
Is America, Charlie Brown*, the
Peanuts characters observe key
moments in American history.
They cross the Atlantic on the
Mayflower and serve as the crew
of the NASA Space Station.
Charlie Brown and Linus visit the
Wright brothers at Kitty Hawk;
Snoopy drives the Golden Spike,
completing the Transcontinental
Railway. Benjamin Franklin
borrows Charlie Brown's kite
for his famous experiment with
electricity, and Linus listens to
the framers of the Constitution
debating various provisions. The
programs feature scores by an
impressive array of jazz musicians,
including Dave Brubeck, David
Benoit, and Wynton Marsalis.
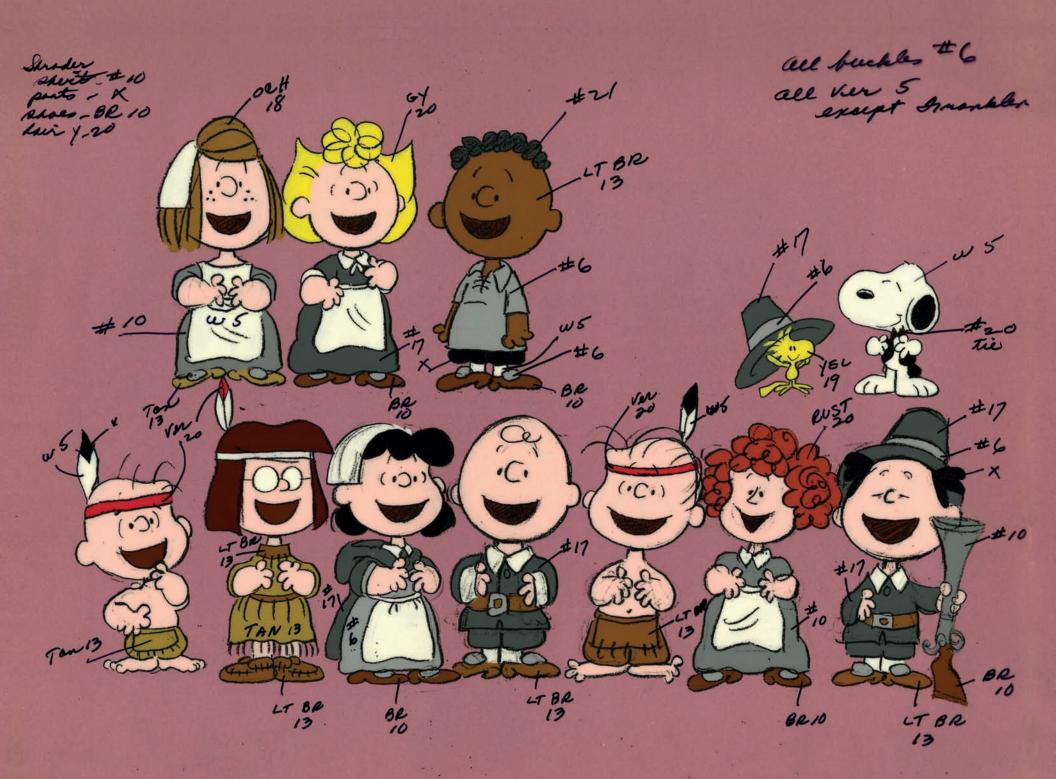
***This Is America, Charlie Brown:
The NASA Space Station***, 1988
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

This Is America, Charlie Brown: Mayflower Voyage, 1988
Production cel
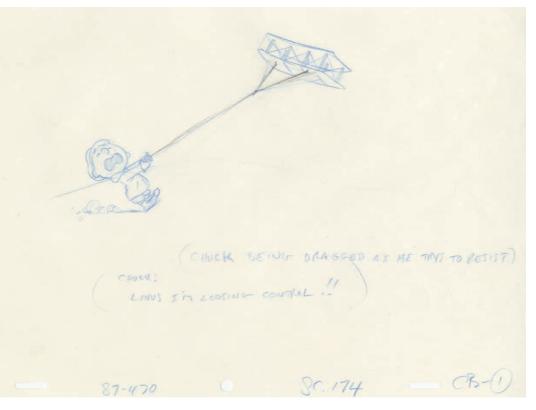
This Is America, Charlie Brown:
Mayflower Voyage, 1988
This guide shows the ink and paint crew what colors
should be used on the characters and their clothes
Color model sheet
Artist unknown

(CHUCK BEING DRAGGED AS HE TRYS TO RESIST)

CHUCK:
LINUS I'M LOOSING CONTROL ..!!

87-470   Sc.174   CB-1

Register to P-1

87-470   Sc-38   K-1

87-470   Sc-38   K-2

COMES TO A SCREECHING HALT.

87-470   Sc-38   K-3

This Is America, Charlie Brown:
The Wright Brothers at Kittyhawk, 1988
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

159
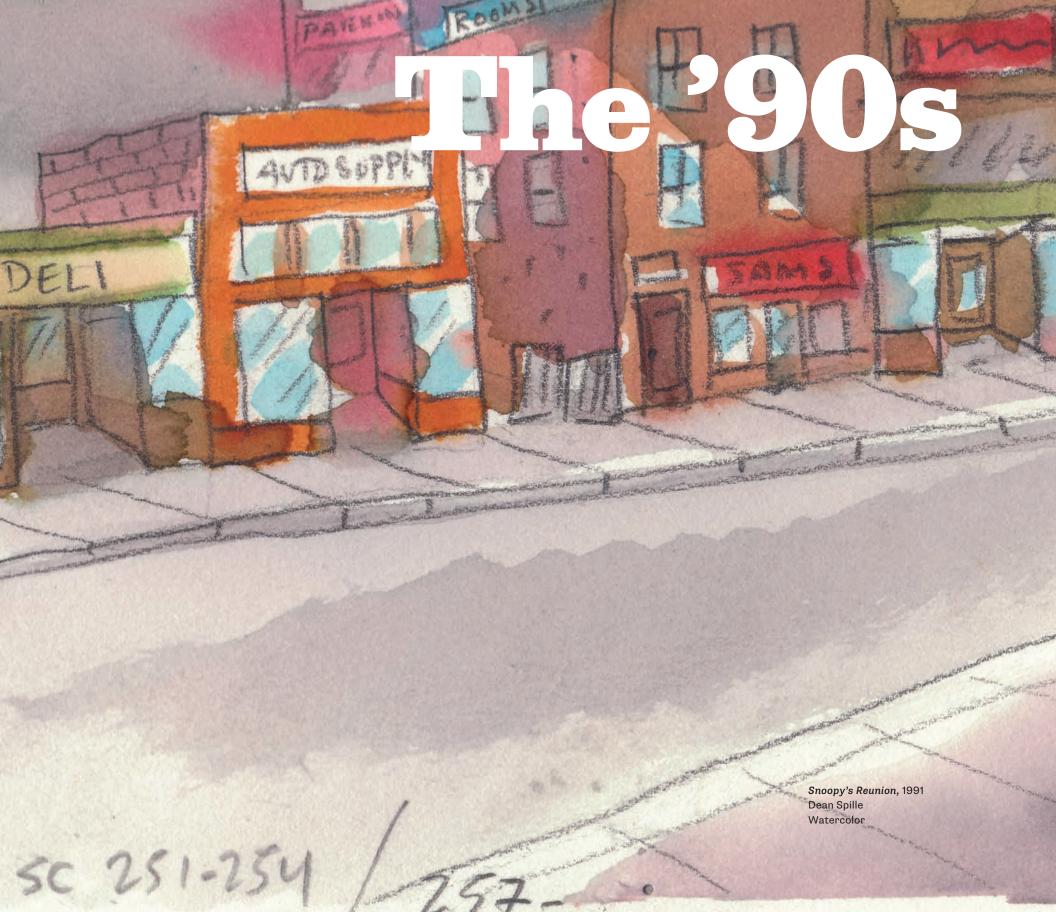
This Is America, Charlie Brown:
The Music and Heros of America, 1988
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

This Is America, Charlie Brown:
The Birth of the Constitution, 1988
Production cel

Snoopy's Reunion, 1991
Color model cel
Artist unknown

The '90s

Snoopy's Reunion, 1991
Dean Spille
Watercolor

Production of animated *Peanuts* shows declined during the '90s. Only six programs were created during the entire decade, two of which—*It's Spring Training, Charlie Brown!* (1996) and *It Was My Best Birthday Ever, Charlie Brown!* (1997)—were direct-to-video releases. All the participants were growing older and Schulz was simply too busy to devote as much of his time to animation.

"During the '90s, we didn't go down to Hollywood as frequently. We didn't look at things in production," says Jeannie Schulz. "Sparky was simply overwhelmed. As time goes on, you've done everything, you're older, you're better known, and people have access to you who didn't. It probably became more difficult for Lee and Bill, too. It wasn't the pure fun it was in the beginning."

She pauses and looks around Schulz's studio; "He started off drawing down here, and ended up back in the corner. Life backed him into a corner, literally and figuratively."

However, Schulz took great pride in *Why, Charlie Brown, Why?* (1990), in which Linus learns his friend Janice has leukemia. Although Linus sadly asks the title question, he serves as Janice's champion, scolding the children who make fun of her when chemotherapy causes her to lose her hair. The program ends on an upbeat note, with Janice in remission. Linus pushes her on the playground swing and is delighted to see that her blond hair has grown back.
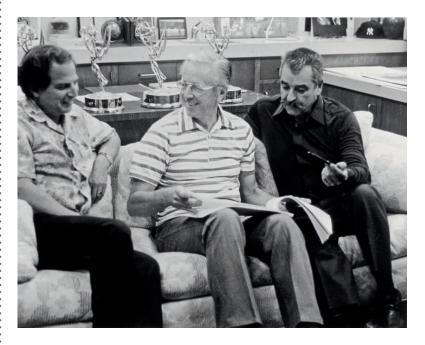
"Sparky was very proud of that show because he really had to stretch into something that he didn't know at first," explains Jeannie Schulz. "Helen Carruthers, a nurse from Oakland, wrote to him and suggested he do something about cancer. He said, 'I don't know anything about it. I can only draw what I know.' She came and talked with him a couple of times and told him some of the issues she saw children going through with cancer treatments. When he wrote the story, it was the 'Aha! I think I know how to deal with this' moment. He was also proud of the way the show stayed true to his characters."

Sam Jaimes, who directed the special, adds, "When Sparky said he wanted to do that, most of us thought, 'What?

Is he crazy? It's such a somber subject.' But he knew what he was doing."

In a 1997 interview Schulz said, "Three years ago I had a whole TV series rejected. CBS decided it would like a Saturday morning series about Snoopy and his brothers and sisters as puppies. I wrote eight of them—the more I wrote the better they got—I sent them to an animator who sent them to CBS. A couple of weeks went by, I didn't hear anything. Finally they said no, they didn't want it, because the dogs didn't talk. I said, 'Well, dogs don't talk.' But they never even called me to discuss it."

You're in the Super Bowl, Charlie Brown (1994) was the last *Peanuts* special to air before Schulz's death in February 2000.

Charles Schulz looking at a script with Lee Mendelson and Bill Melendez at One Snoopy Place.

Why, Charlie Brown, Why?, 1990
Production cel

SNOOPY WALKS PAST HOUSES - X-MAS LIGHTS A-TWINKLING -

HESITATES AT STREET SIGN -

REGARDS HIS BUNDLE -

UNWRAPS IT -
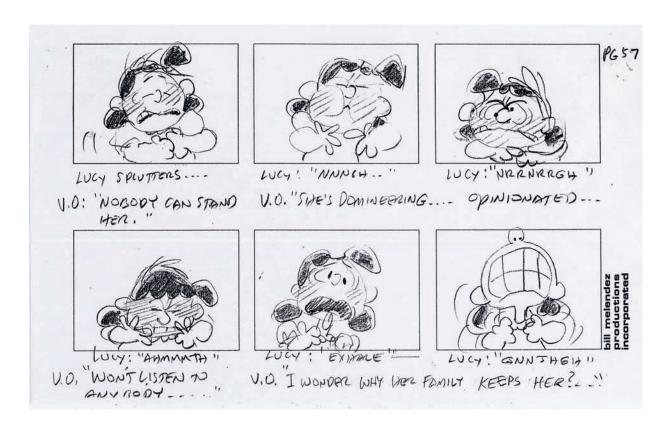
I'll Be Home for Christmas, 1990s
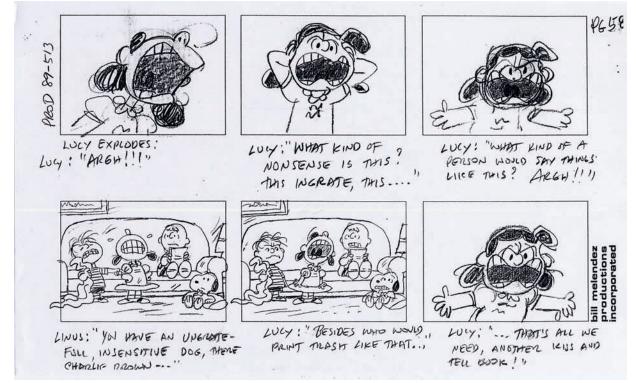
(Unproduced Show)
Snoopy decides to enter a skating competition in faraway Hollywood, which sadly keeps him from spending Christmas with Charlie Brown, who wants nothing more for Christmas than to have his dog back home. Lucy also wants Snoopy back . . . to pay his delinquent psychiatric bill— a whopping twenty cents!

I'll Be Home for Christmas, Unproduced
Storyboards
Artist unknown
Ink

It's a Dog's Life, Charlie Brown, 1990s
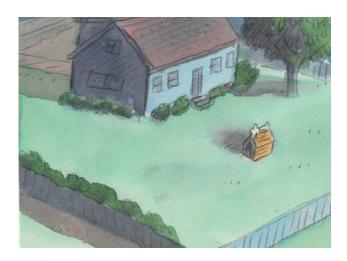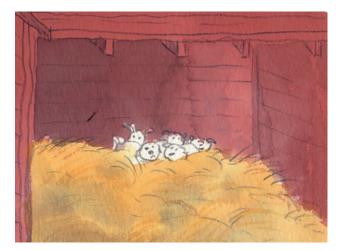
(Unproduced Show)
Snoopy writes his memoirs and those of his siblings, chronicling their adventures together during WWI and beyond. Charlie Brown is entrusted with proofreading the final draft before it's sent to the publisher. Linus and Lucy listen as Charlie Brown reads aloud and, like most of Snoopy's writing, it begins ominously: "It was a dark and stormy night . . ."

It's a Dog's Life, Charlie Brown, Unproduced
Storyboards
Artist unknown
Graphite

167
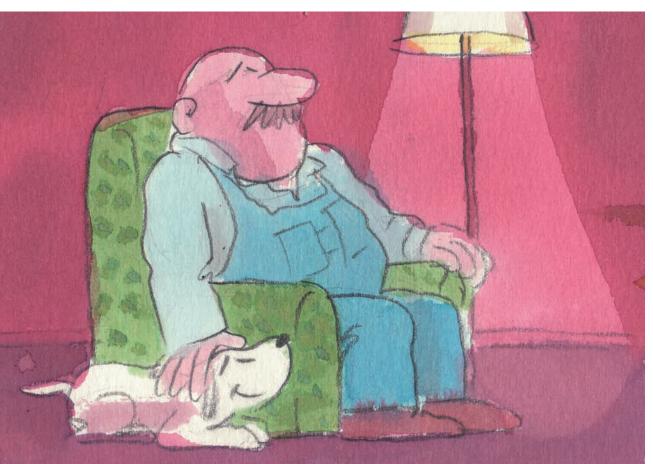
Snoopy's Reunion, 1991

Snoopy decides to hold a family reunion, only to discover that the Daisy Hill Puppy Farm is now a parking structure. Snoopy, Spike, Andy, Olaf, Belle, and a few new siblings perform as a country band.

Dean Spille
Watercolor
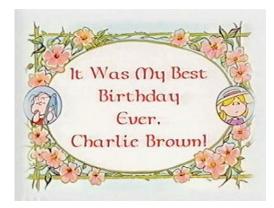
This page and opposite:
Snoopy's Reunion, 1991
Dean Spille
Watercolor

**It Was My Best Birthday Ever,
Charlie Brown!, 1997**

Linus meets and falls in love with a
talented new girl named Mimi, who is
visiting her grandmother from outside the
neighborhood. Completely enchanted by
her singing, he invites her to his birthday
party so the rest of the gang can finally
meet the girl he has been talking about.
His only birthday wish is to see his new
friend Mimi one more time before she
leaves and goes home.

*It Was My Best Birthday Ever, Charlie
Brown!,* 1997
Dean Spille
Watercolor

Opposite:
It's Spring Training, Charlie Brown!, 1997
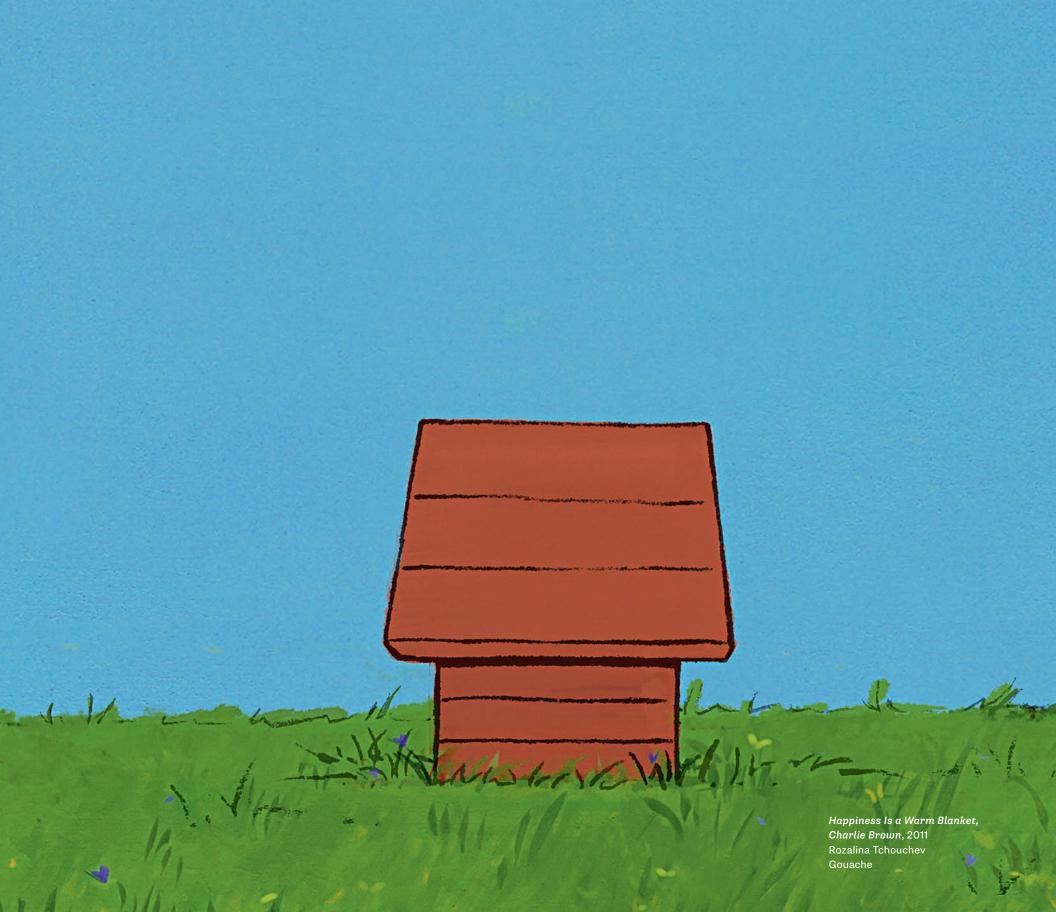
Leland, a pint-size kid, asks "Mr. Manager"
(Charlie Brown) to put him on the team. Leland
manages to help the team win a game(!) and
get the uniforms they've always wanted before
moving on to a league for younger children.

It's Spring Training, Charlie Brown!, 1997
Bill Littlejohn
Graphite

After Sparky: 2000 and Beyond

Happiness Is a Warm Blanket,
Charlie Brown, 2011
Rozalina Tchouchev
Gouache

The decision to continue animating the characters after Schulz's death was a difficult one. "It had been established for the last twenty years that no one else would draw the strip when Sparky no longer drew it," says Jeannie Schulz. "But Sparky always said, 'Television is different. It is not my work: my characters, but not my work.' I remember thinking, in the first global meeting, that we could give some leeway to the television shows. Other members of the family felt, no, we don't want to change anything. So Lee had to construct television shows by melding strips together."

Mendelson says that while they were working on the shows from *A Charlie Brown Valentine* (2002) to *He's a Bully, Charlie Brown* (2006), he and Melendez were determined to maintain Schulz's legacy: "We would go to meetings where people would say, 'Why don't you try this?' We'd decline, saying, 'We're doing this because these are Sparky's words: He's the author and this is his show.'"

Reflecting on *Happiness Is a Warm Blanket, Charlie Brown* (2011), codirector Andy Beall says, "I think you could write a hundred more animated specials with these characters, because the comic strip is so dense and so true. You can take one strip and write a whole special. It's true. It grabs you. That's what I think is appealing about it and why it's lasted as long, too."

Animator Bob Scott adds, "I love working with these characters: It's the closest any of us will get to experience working with Bill Melendez. We feel like we have Charles Schulz, the greatest gag man in the world, almost in the next room. If we're stuck for an idea, we'll thumb through a collection of the strips and say, 'Here's a strip that totally fits in the story.'"

But Craig Schulz worries about remaining true to his father's vision, more than a decade after his death: "These days, people tend to know *Peanuts* more through the animation than the comic strip. When you read the comic strip and know the creator and his thoughts on life, what he was like and how he treated people—it makes a difference in what you create. You know where the edges are, and when you've overstepped the boundaries."

Above:
Happiness Is a Warm Blanket Charlie Brown, 2011
Andy Beall
Graphite

Opposite:
It's the Pied Piper, Charlie Brown, 2000
Dean Spille
Watercolor
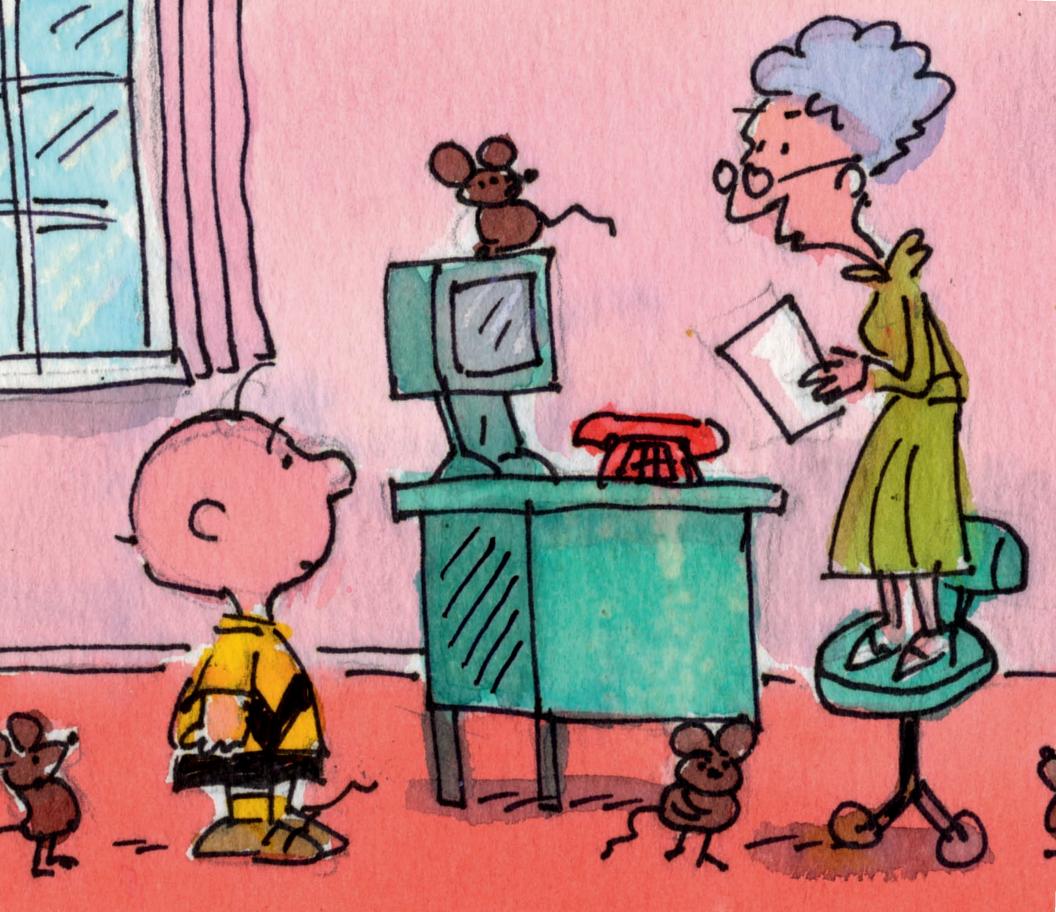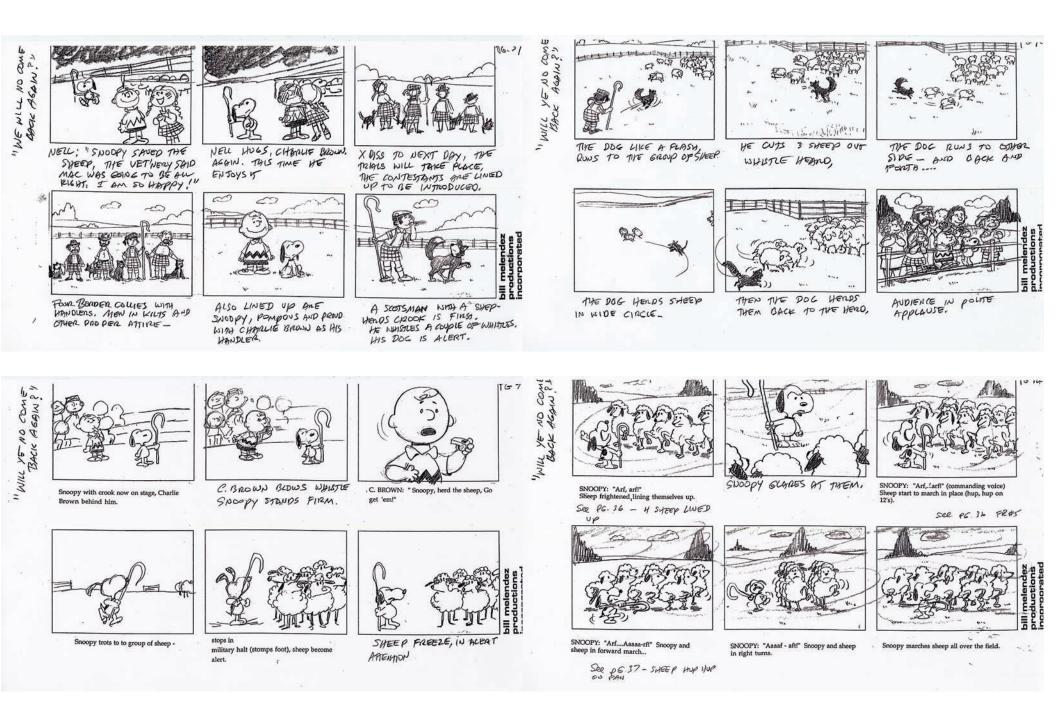
But within those boundaries, the legacy of the *Peanuts* specials continues. *Wall-E* director Andrew Stanton says, "Within the world of animation there's a visual language that everybody knows that you can shorthand when you're talking with other artists: 'I want that Snoopy dance' or 'I want that *Peanuts* walk or gesture.' It's a distinct visual vocabulary."

"Charles Schulz means a lot to all of us," adds *Phineas and Ferb* cocreator Dan Povenmire. "He opened up so many doors that have helped us tell our stories better and make people laugh better."

His partner, Jeff Marsh, concludes, "And he did it without giant exploding alien robot Kung Fu fighters, without a whole lot of screaming and yelling, and without a bunch of meanness."

Storyboard panels (top left set):

NELL: "SNOOPY SAVED THE SHEEP, THE VET'NERY SAID MAC WAS GOING TO BE ALL RIGHT. I AM SO HAPPY!"

NELL HUGS CHARLIE BROWN, AGAIN. THIS TIME HE ENJOYS IT.

X DISS TO NEXT DAY. THE TRIALS WILL TAKE PLACE, THE CONTESTANTS ARE LINED UP TO BE INTRODUCED.

FOUR BORDER COLLIES WITH HANDLERS, MEN IN KILTS AND OTHER PROPER ATTIRE—

ALSO LINED UP ARE SNOOPY, POMPOUS AND PROUD WITH CHARLIE BROWN AS HIS HANDLER.

A SCOTSMAN WITH A SHEPHERDS CROOK IS FIRST. HE WHISTLES A COUPLE OF WHISTLES, HIS DOG IS ALERT.

Storyboard panels (top right set):

THE DOG LIKE A FLASH, RUNS TO THE GROUP OF SHEEP.

HE CUTS 3 SHEEP OUT WHISTLE HEARD,

THE DOG RUNS TO OTHER SIDE — AND BACK AND FORTH....

THE DOG HERDS SHEEP IN WIDE CIRCLE.

THEN THE DOG HERDS THEM BACK TO THE HERO,

AUDIENCE IN POLITE APPLAUSE.

bill melendez productions incorporated

Storyboard panels (bottom left set):

Snoopy with crook now on stage, Charlie Brown behind him.

C. BROWN BLOWS WHISTLE SNOOPY STANDS FIRM.

C. BROWN: "Snoopy, herd the sheep, Go get 'em!"

Snoopy trots to to group of sheep –

stops in military halt (stomps foot), sheep become alert.

SHEEP FREEZE, IN ALERT ATTENTION

bill melendez productions incorporated

Storyboard panels (bottom right set):

SNOOPY: "Arf, arf!" Sheep frightened, lining themselves up. See PG. 36 – 4 SHEEP LINED UP

SNOOPY GLARES AT THEM.

SNOOPY: "Arf,..!arf!" (commanding voice) Sheep start to march in place (hup, hup on 12's). See PG. 36 FRAS

SNOOPY: "Arf....Aaaaa-rf!" Snoopy and sheep in forward march... See PG 37 – SHEEP HUP HUP ON PAN

SNOOPY: "Aaaaf - aft!" Snoopy and sheep in right turns.

Snoopy marches sheep all over the field.

bill melendez productions incorporated

Will Ye No Come Back Again, Charlie Brown?, 1990s
Artist unknown
Graphite

176

Will Ye No Come Back Again, Charlie Brown?, 1990s

(Unproduced Show)
Charlie Brown and the gang head to Scotland to compete in a singing competition. Meanwhile, Snoopy goes golfing at St. Andrews, tries his hand at sheepherding, and leads the kids in choir. Charlie Brown and Linus try to win the affections of a little Scottish girl named, Nell and the three of them go on a search for the Loch Ness Monster, but what will they see instead? This unproduced show was inspired by a trip that Schulz and his wife, Jean, took to Scotland.

Charlie Brown's Christmas Tales, 2002

The Christmas Tales was a collection of five Christmas-themed vignettes inspired by the comic strip.

Charlie Brown's Christmas Tales, 2002
Dean Spille
Watercolor

A Charlie Brown Valentine, 2002

A Charlie Brown Valentine was based on a series of strips revolving around Charlie Brown's infatuation with the Little Red-Haired Girl and his attempts to ask her out to the school dance. This was the first special produced after Schulz's death.

Above and opposite:
A Charlie Brown Valentine, 2002
Dean Spille
Watercolor
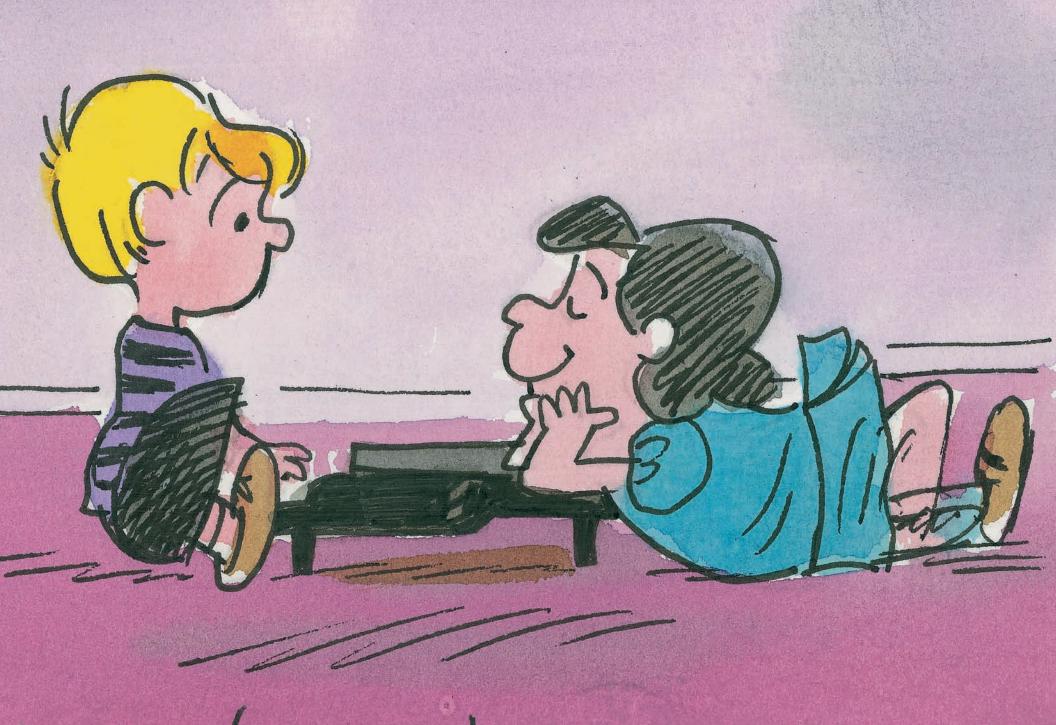
"That music is just perfect *Peanuts* music, and it just puts a smile on your face every time you hear it."
PATRICK MCDONNELL, CARTOONIST
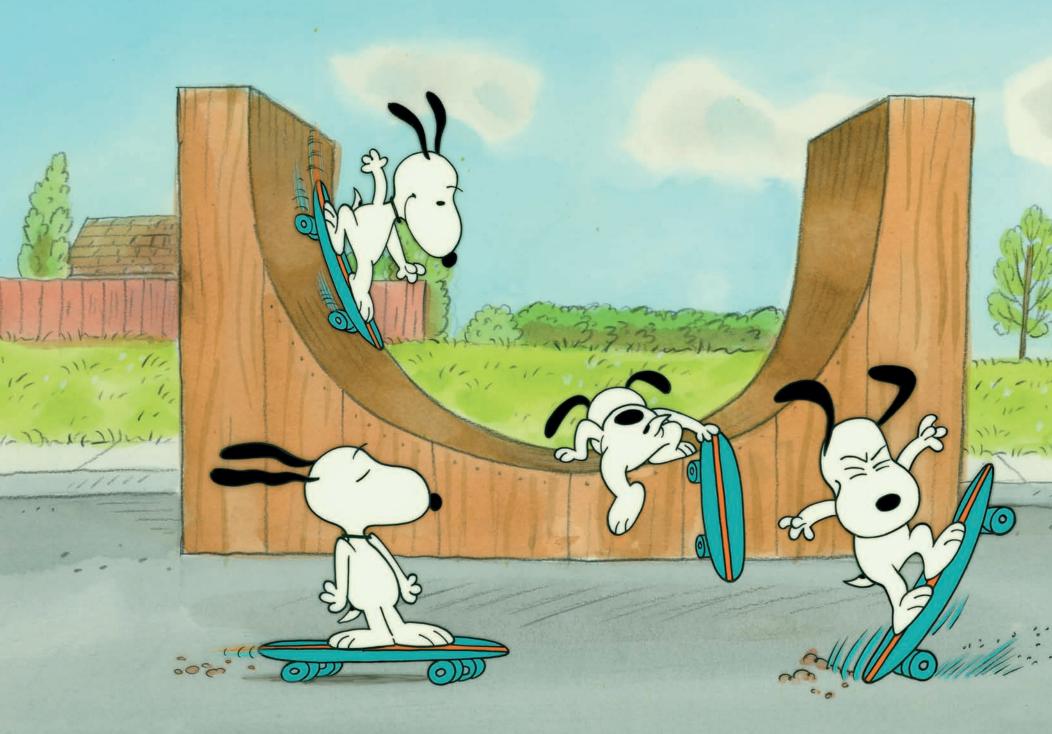
I Want a Dog for Christmas, Charlie Brown, 2003
Dean Spille
Watercolor

I Want a Dog for Christmas, Charlie Brown, **2003**

Rerun loves playing with Snoopy. After hearing that Snoopy's brother Spike doesn't have an owner, Rerun invites Spike to come stay with him to be his very own dog. After a run-in with an overzealous Lucy, Spike is overfed and Rerun's mother determines Rerun is not fit to keep the dog, so Spike returns to the desert.
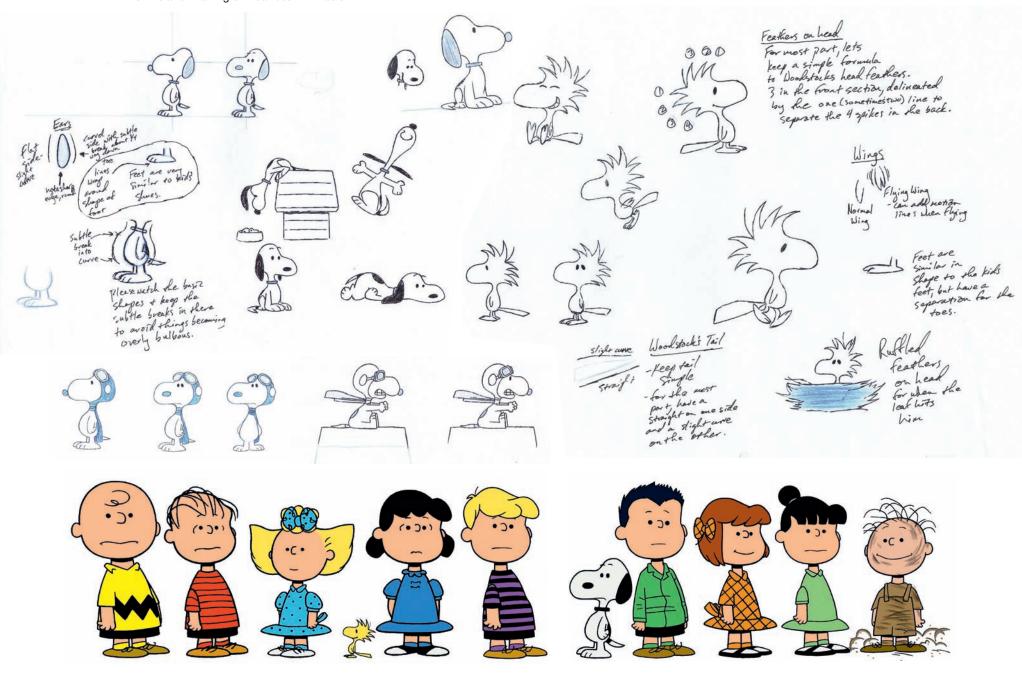
He's a Bully, Charlie Brown, 2006
Production cel signed by Bill Melendez
Rerun gets in trouble at summer camp when he loses his grandfather's
prized collection of marbles to the camp bully, Joe Agate. In a climax
worthy of *Shane*, Charlie Brown becomes the hero when he defeats the
bully at his own game and wins back Rerun's marbles.

Bill Melendez

Happiness Is a Warm Blanket, Charlie Brown, 2011
Top:
Animator's sketches and notes about drawing Snoopy and Woodstock
Andy Beall
Graphite
Bottom:
Character lineup
Andy Beall and Pamela Long
Pencil and digital
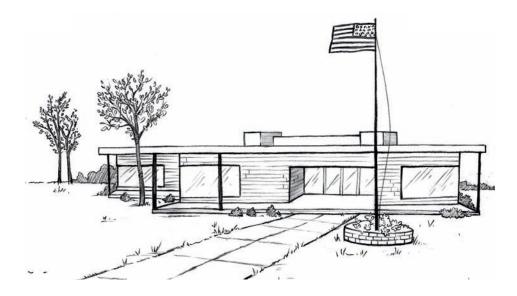
Happiness Is a Warm Blanket, Charlie Brown, 2011

Cowritten by Schulz's son Craig and *Pearls Before Swine* creator Stephan Pastis, *Warm Blanket* is based on two old continuities about Lucy trying to break Linus of his blanket habit. In early 1961, she buried it; she made the blanket into a kite that blew out to sea in 1962.
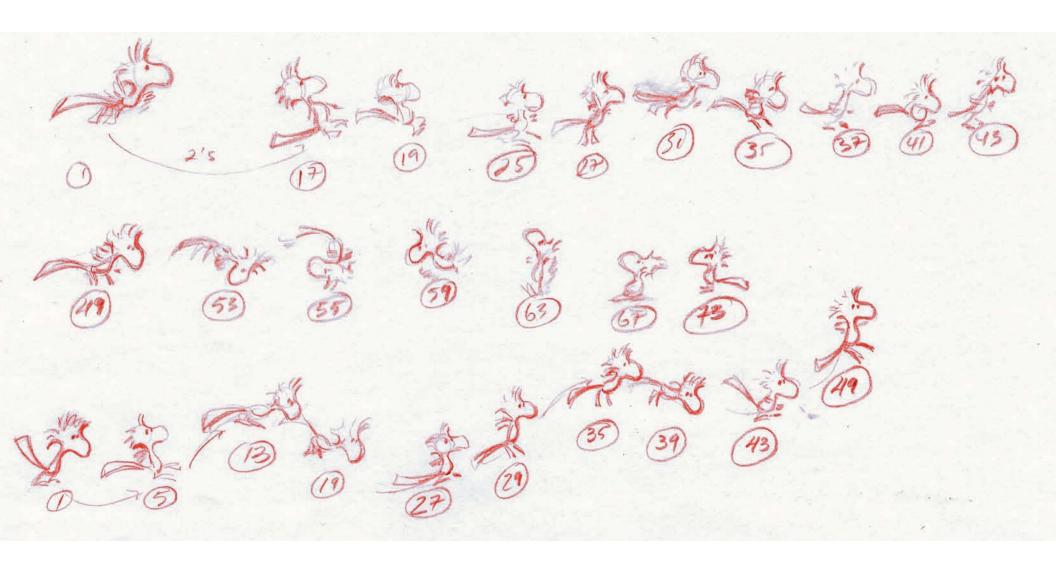
Happiness Is a Warm Blanket,
Charlie Brown, 2011
Top, left:
Edgar Carlos
Graphite

Bottom, left:
Seonna Hong
Gouache

Top, right:
Rozalina Tchouchev
Gouache

Bottom, right:
Edgar Carlos
Graphite

2's

Happiness Is a Warm Blanket,
Charlie Brown, 2011
Frank Molieri
Red pencil

*Happiness Is a Warm Blanket,
Charlie Brown*, 2011
Rozalina Tchouchev
Gouache

"I think Schulz was a genius. It's really funny how people think they know stuff—even animators or artists. But you really don't know it." **FRANK MOLIERI, ANIMATOR**

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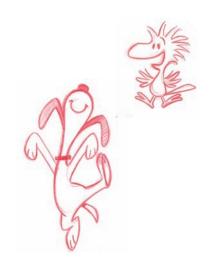
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Snoopy and Woodstock Model sheet poses
Bob Scott
Graphite

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Charlie Brown Model sheet pose
Bob Scott
Graphite
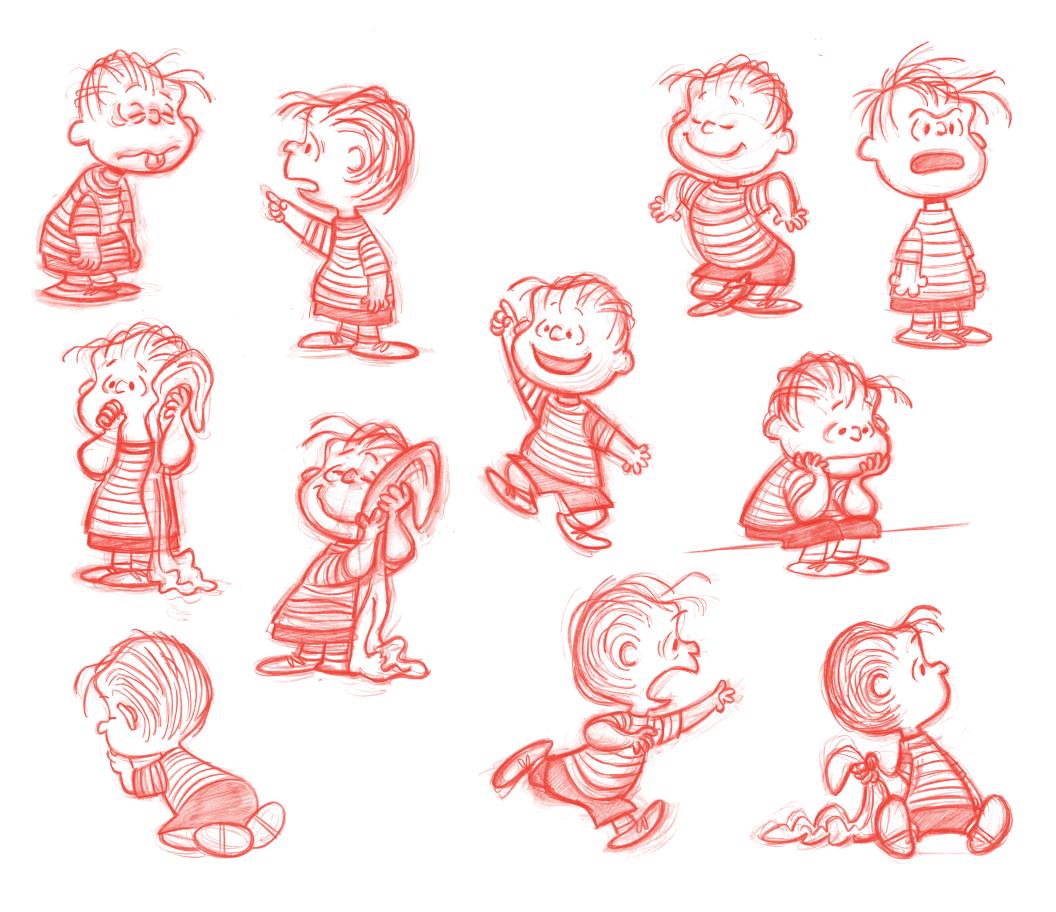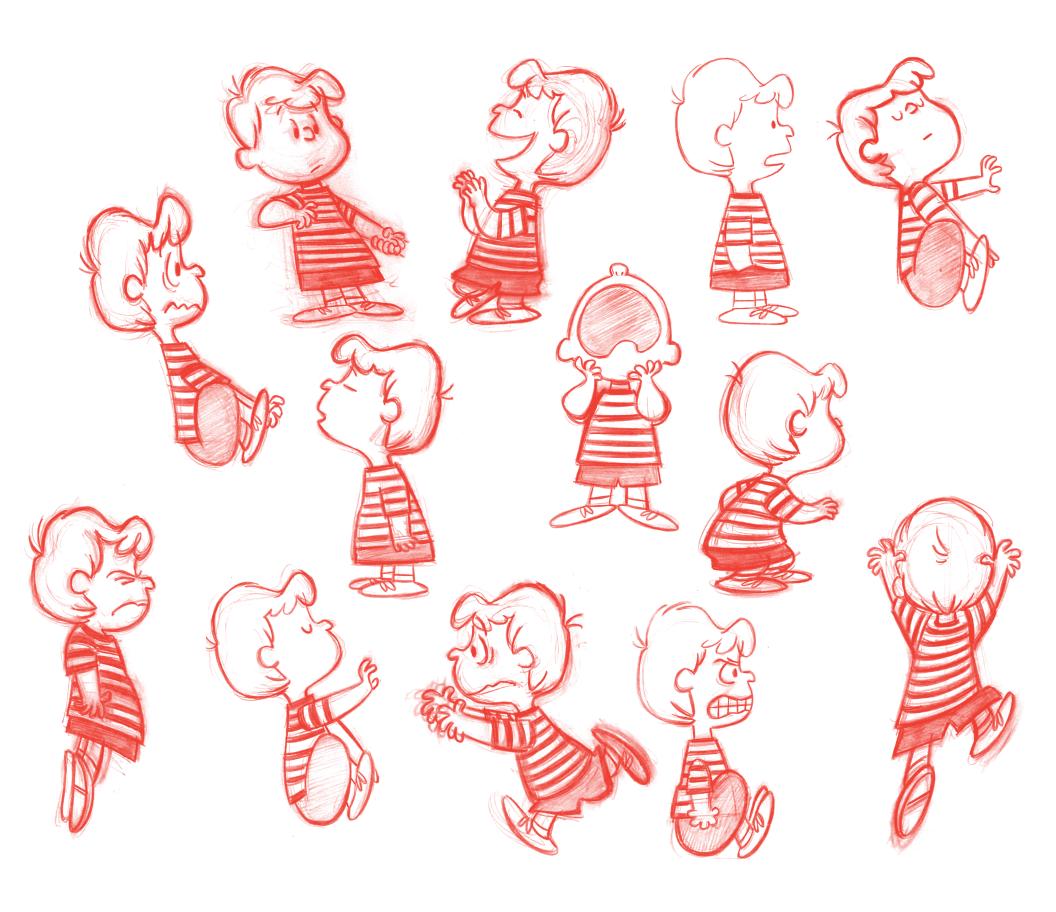
A note from Bill Melendez to the author features his signature self-caricature
Bill Melendez
Ink

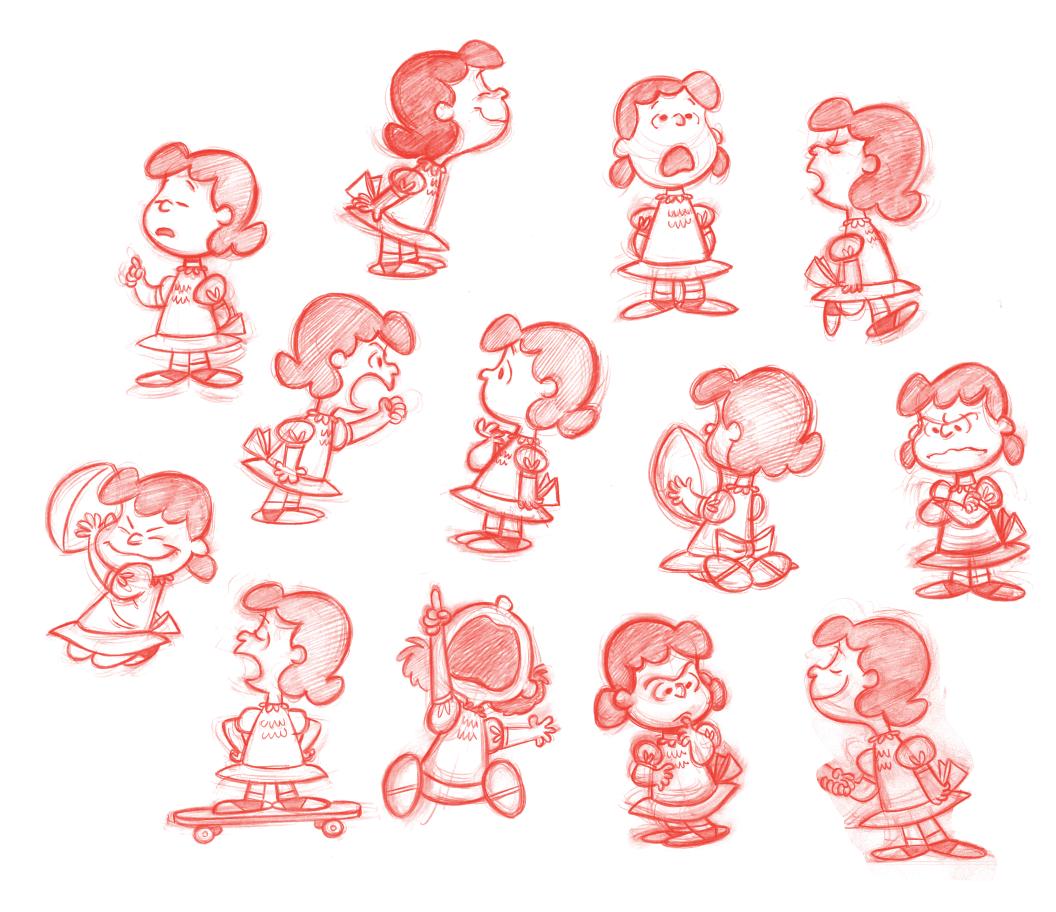*He's Your Dog, Charlie Brown*, 1968
Production cel

He's Your Dog, Charlie Brown, 1968
Production cel

Charles Solomon, internationally known animation historian and critic, has written for magazines and newspapers worldwide, from the *New York Times* to *Rolling Stone*. He is the author of several books, including *The Art of Toy Story 3* and *Enchanted Drawings: The History of Animation*, which was the first film book to be nominated for a National Book Critics' Circle Award. He lives in Los Angeles, California.

Lee Mendelson was executive producer for all *Peanuts* animation from 1963 to 2010. He wrote the lyrics to *Christmas Time Is Here* and wrote the *New York Times* bestseller *The Making of A Charlie Brown Christmas* and two biographies of Charles Schulz. His network television productions have won 12 Emmys and 4 Peabody Awards.

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